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Winter  
1989

# THRUST

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No. 32

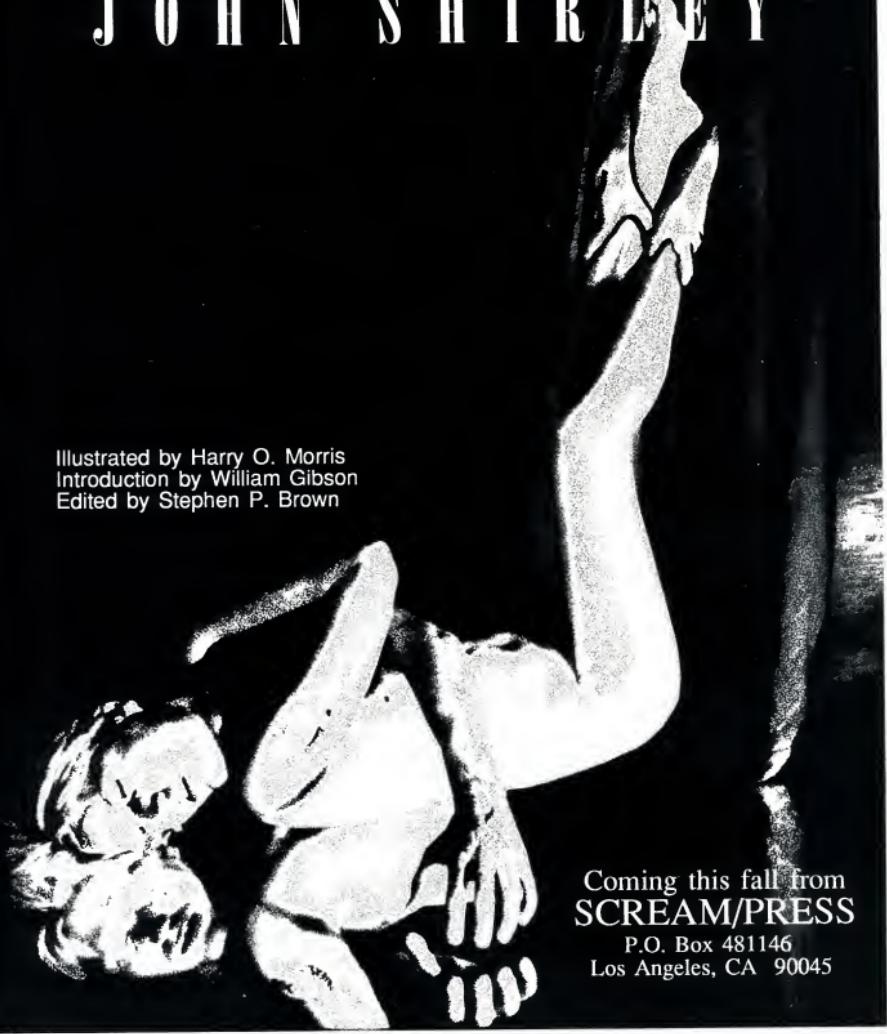
SCIENCE FICTION & FANTASY REVIEW



# HEATSEEKER

## JOHN SHIREY

Illustrated by Harry O. Morris  
Introduction by William Gibson  
Edited by Stephen P. Brown



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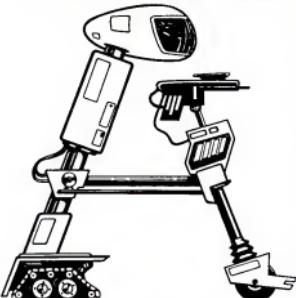
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# IMPULSE



Doug Frazt

Welcome to *THRUST* 32, another historic milestone in our continuing quest for the perfect science fiction and fantasy review magazine. If nothing major goes awry, this issue should appear as scheduled in December 1988, and be the fourth issue of *THRUST* released this year. This is the first time we've managed four issues in a single calendar year, and we have every reason to hope that it will not be the last time we do so.

**The Issue At Hand:** No less than four of our columnists made this issue--David Bischoff, John Shirley, Richard E. Geis and Darrell Schweitzer--thus continuing the resurgence of the *THRUST* regulars.

Dave Bischoff once again tells us more about what he's been doing lately--in this case, he's been doing fast-turn-around novelizations for new, soon-to-be-released movies. Novelizations are a literary form clearly looked down upon as beneath serious critical consideration by SF literary cognoscenti. Dave may be the first SF novelist to talk about the art and business of novelizing, and I think you'll find what he has to say quite interesting.

John Shirley returns this issue with an autobiography of sorts--frank, introspective analysis of his life and career. John's crusading style has led to strong reader reactions to past columns, and I'm quite interested to see how our readers react to this quite different column.

Richard E. Geis' column this issue consists primarily of some communications from the early '70s with Robert A. Heinlein which Dick was asked not to print in his fanzine while Heinlein was still alive. I don't think there are any shocking revelations here. But this kind of material--and I expect more and more to surface over the next few years--serves to give us a closer understanding of one of the field's greatest, but most private, authors.

Darrell Schweitzer once again looks at some recent films, including that quasi-SF tour de force, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*, George Lucas' high-budget fantasy *Willow*, and the horror/SF remake of the month, *The Blob*. Meanwhile, Gregory Benford returns to these pages to contribute a short retrospective on *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the first modern-look SF movie, released 20 years ago. (Could it really have been that long ago?)

**Nolacon Pros and Cons:** My "last minute" decision to attend this year's Worldcon in New Orleans came out quite favorably. I enjoyed Nolacon far more than any SF convention I've attended in the past ten years, actually having a far better time than I had expected. Although I was a frequent con-goer beginning in the late '60s and throughout the '70s, Nolacon was my first SF convention outside of the Baltimore/Washington area since Noreascon II, the 1980 Worldcon in Boston.

My primary memories of Noreascon II are of wandering around for endless hours, strangely unable to find anyone I knew (or wanted to get to know), asking myself why

time in moving quickly through the dense crowd to the nearest doors, which were cordoned off and guarded by your standard-issue convention gopher. I confidently stepped under the ropes and walked up to the gopher and told him who I was and why I wanted to get in early. As expected, he nervously told me that he was not authorized to let anyone in this door, and said that I should go to the main entrance. And where was the main entrance? Straight ahead, down more than 60 feet of hallway crammed with fans. I smiled and said "thank you" in a kind and understanding tone, then opened his door and walked into the ballroom. Problem solved. The gopher, after all, could not make a scene without drawing to the attention of several hundred fans that they were standing a few feet from a door leading just where they wanted to go.

Thus having sidestepped the kind of frustrating situation that one learns to expect when amateurs plan and operate such massive functions, I entered the ballroom in plenty of time, and ended up sitting with Stan and Lisa Robinson, and enjoying the ceremony quite a bit, considering that I did, after all, lose the award.

I also enjoyed being on three panel discussions on the program: "The Economics of Small Press"; "The Well-Tempered Book Reviewer" and "Hugos Report Card: A Close Look . . ." I am embarrassed to say, however, that despite my best intentions, I did not attend a single panel that I wasn't on or any other of the concurrent program items during the entire three days I was there. (Many fans brag of such feats, but I actually enjoy attending good panels, talks, and other such "sercon" items--and indeed need to attend them to be on the lookout for new voices for *THRUST*.)

Other highlights included the Friday night Bantam cruise on the Mississippi, Tor's penthouse suite roof party, the French Quarter, and talking with so many *THRUST* readers, apparently including (by my rough count) every single person who voted for *THRUST* on their Hugo ballot! The lowlights were the amazing number of times I saw someone across the room I wanted to talk to, but never made it over before they disappeared, and the many people I wanted to get a chance to talk to but never even met up with, including--no kidding--*THRUST* assistant editor Ann Morris, who was at the Worldcon as well, but somehow we managed to never be in the same place at the same time.

**A Loser's Lament:** I had fun looking over the complete data on the Hugo voting, especially the best semiprozine category where *THRUST* was one of the nominees. There was some good news to be gleaned from the numbers, and some bad news.

I was pleased to see that *THRUST* received 32 nominations, only eight less than *Interzone*, and two more than *Aboriginal SF*. (We didn't come close to *Locus'* 121 or *SFC's* 103, however.) So

-----continued on page 12

## Novelizations

Actually, the books themselves don't use the word. You generally don't see NOVELIZATION bannered above the title. What you get is *Ghandi Part II: Ashes*, a novel by John Doe, based on the screenplay. Generally, the screenplay writers get a credit on the cover. "Novelize" won't be found in Webster's--not yet, anyway. But what you have when you pick up one from a rack is still a novel, a book just like any other in that it exists independent of its parent. You don't have to have seen the movie to get the plot and characters--in fact, generally reading the book and seeing the movie it's based on are two entirely different experiences.

I've written four novelizations. They're books just as my others are, and they fit neatly together on the shelf. I have very positive feelings toward these books, and I'll tell you why.

Now, I suppose the process has rather a bad name amongst writers in general. I recall Bill Rotsler calling them "creative typing." (He did a movie called *Vice Squad*, but I haven't seen any others--under his name anyway.) Steve Brown, upon hearing about my second novelization, called me "Alan Dean Bischoff." I've even heard that the dean of SF novelizations, Alan Foster himself, privately disparages the form. Although a well-known, high-income bracket writer won't take on these projects, the average writer takes them on in a flash. (Foster apparently still does them only because he's paid so handsomely.) I've had several writer friends express desires to write them, but they've never had the opportunity. And sometimes when writers do write them, they don't get to repeat the experience: the book doesn't come out right.

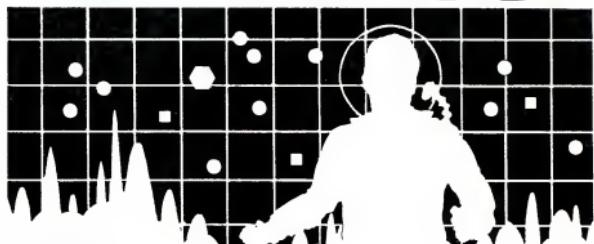
Me, I love writing novelizations, and I'll tell you why.

First, though, let me tell you how I got into the business of writing them, and a little bit about the actual history of the things, and then about the process.

My first novelization was on a screenplay entitled *WarGames* from Twentieth Century Fox. One December, I got a call from my friend Bob McCoy at Dell Books. "Hey, Dave, would you be interested in doing a novelization?" he asked. Of course, I was. Like most writers, I can always use work. I've turned down writing jobs before—I was offered a V book and passed, for example, not because I had anything against the series but because it was a period when I had lots of deadlines. This was supposed to be a movie coming out in June of '83 about a kid who gets into a NORAD computer and causes trouble. Bob sent me the third draft of the screenplay, and I wasn't terribly impressed. But I saw possibilities, so I agreed to write the novelization. Then he sent me the fourth draft, and this was much better. I actually got excited. I had January and February to write it, so I took my IBM with me on a visit to Florida in January, and in a motel room at Daytona Beach I lost my novelization virginity.

Now there aren't any books on the subject of novelizing. No one teaches classes on the subject. I've never heard of editors ever doing more than tossing a writer the script and letting him sink or

# ESSAYING



KLOSTERMAN © 88

## David Bischoff

swim. I can remember feeling distinctly nervous about the whole proposition. It didn't help that I was visiting Joe and Gay Haldeman, and Joe had just had a bad experience with a Spielberg novelization project. Here I was with a script and I had to turn it into a book. Most scripts average about 120 pages, and I knew I was going to have to expand the story here and there to come up with 70,000 words. I also figured that the key to this story was in the character of David Lightman, the character played by Matthew Broderick who accidentally sets off a chain of events that might result in World War III. So the first thing I did was to write a piece that had no counterpart in the script. My scene, my dialogue, to set up David and his father and their relationship—and foreshadow the excitement to come. I remember well finishing up those ten pages or so, then walking out to the Atlantic beach and the breeze and feeling really good.

I had it, I had the angle I needed. I had the all-important style and feel I wanted for the book, and just knew I could do it, and get the book finished on time. Writing novels is a profession fraught with uncertainty and insecurity. What a rush to be at the beginning of a novel and feel in control and confident.

I turned in the rough draft to Bob in mid-February. At the time, my practice was to write one draft on my IBM Selectric Two, let it sit a bit, edit it, and then rewrite a bit as I typed the final manuscript. Bob called the day after I sent him the draft, told me that it was a good job and that I probably wouldn't have to retype it. "This is a better-looking manuscript than a lot I've seen," he explained.

Okay, I thought. Sounds good to me! The book came out in late May, and the movie came out in June and turned into a long-playing summer hit. I went to see a sneak-preview and was a little upset—the movie didn't look at all like I'd visualized it. Matthew Broderick played David Lightman in a much different way than I'd written him. I was so caught up in my version of the script, I don't think I liked the actual

movie direction by John Badham until the second time I saw it. The novelization sold lots of copies and made Chuck Adams, Dell Managing and Tie-In editor, very happy. The book sold in about twenty countries overseas—including Russia, though I don't think I ever got any rubles. (I think I have to go to Moscow to spend them.) The British editor wrote—"This book is almost better than the movie itself!" I got lots of nice comments from people who read it.

The book was also very popular in reading programs in junior and senior high schools. Apparently novelizations are a great help to English teachers trying to encourage reading. I spoke to a few junior and high school assemblies, becoming a momentary celebrity. I'll never forget the young deaf girl who came up to me, shook my hand, and thanked me for enriching her experience of the film so much. Wow.

(Parenthetically, I should say that the experience prompted me to write a young adult book called *The Crunch Bunch*, a novel about teenagers and computers. It's one of my favorite novels.)

All of this for about six weeks of work. Not bad, I thought. I wanted to do more novelizations. Where did these things come from anyway?

Where they came from was the mass-marketing paperback phenomenon. Paperbacks were popular in the '40s and '50s, but only as a kind of bastard child of hardcovers and pulps. It wasn't until the '60s when companies discovered that some gold could be struck in the paperback mines. Some gold could be panned as well, and one of those marketing devices was the novelization. By the '80s publishers discovered that if a new movie was based upon an existing book, sales of that book could be hitched to the initial publicity and, hopefully, the success of the movie as well. One of the first novelizations I recall reading was, coincidentally, an SF novel based on *The Fantastic Voyage* by Isaac Asimov. I thought the book was much better than the movie. Earlier, I recall reading a book called *Khartoom* by Alan Callicou based on the

upcoming movie. Again, I thought the book more entertaining. The idea clearly was that the movie wasn't based on an existing book and it might MAKE a good book, why not take the script, assign it to some hungry writer, and bring it out as a novel? This helped solve one of the perennial problems of marketing fiction: the expense of publicity. You bring a novelization out, you already have the built-in popularity of the movie to work with.

In the late '60s, Bantam Books began the famous series of *Star Trek* books with collections of prose treatments of episodes by James Blish. These were immensely popular, actually enabling Blish to spend the last years of his life as a full-time writer. Publishers began to do more and more "tie-ins," splitting off into "new" books based on characters whose media popularity had already been established. Then in the mid-'70s things went a little nuts.

I can remember receiving free books from Ballantine in the mid-'70s. One of these was a book called *Star Wars* by George Lucas. I remember something about a movie being hyped at the '76 Worldcon with the same name, and upon closer inspection saw that this was the novelization. As it happened, when I saw *Star Wars*, I knew it would be a hit. What was more surprising was that the novelization was a huge hit as well, dragging the whole Ballantine SF line (soon to be Del Rey books) into stratospheric heights. It soon leaked out that the actual writer of the *Star Wars* novelization was Alan Dean Foster, who'd become so popular with his *Star Trek* animation books.

Naturally other novelizations followed, perhaps the most successful being *Closer Encounters of the Third Kind*. Into the '80s, novelizations died down to mere steady profitability, nothing to sneer at in a decidedly UNsteady business.

I learned from Bob Mecoy, though, that there can be definite failures in novelizations. Chuck Adams at Dell, for example, had been very excited by the script for *National Lampoon's High School Reunion*. The film turned out to be nothing like the script—a possibility with movies, where a lot of improvisation is done during shooting—and worse, the movie bombed.

Anyway, back to me. I was so pleased with *WarGames* that I let it be known to my agent and to other tie-in editors that I was "available." I got a lot of possibilities in that period, too—usually cases in which I would have done the novelization if Dell won the bid for the property. Books that would have had a Bischoff byline if they'd been from Dell included *V, The Last Starfighter*, and *Ghostbusters*.

The most spectacular of missed opportunities came in the fall of 1983, when Chuck and Bob called to ask me to do the novelization of the TV movie, *The Day After*. This would have to be a fast job, but the project looked like a winner. Besides, I'd already done a lot of research on nuclear war. Chuck's idea was to get the book out into stores the Monday after the Sunday premiere of *The Day After*. (You do remember the show, don't you? It starred Jason Robards and a nuclear bomb.) That's right, the day after *The Day After*. I was beginning to feel like the atomic kid, but I was game.

I caught a train for New York immediately. I was to see the film, and get the script, then train back and immediately get to work. But soon as I got up, I got the bad news: the show had turned out to be quite controversial. ABC had ordered that there be no tie-ins. The project was a bust. Dell apologized, paid my expenses—but I was very depressed.

(Actually, the trip turned out for the best. The next day I pitched a fantasy series to Sheila Gilbert at NAL, supplying her with sample chapters and an outline for what was to become my *Gaming Magi* series.)

After a while, I figured that I wasn't going to get any more novelization jobs—maybe *WarGames* had been a fluke. Another full year passed before anything else turned up.

Then I got a call from my agent, Suzanne Jaffe and Mike Kazan from Avon had a movie script for me called *The Manhattan Project*. I got the script and read it, and was very impressed. Written by Marshall Brickman (who would also direct) it was a great piece of work. Not only that, Brickman was going to actually let me see the rough-cut of the movie! (All I had to go on in *WarGames* was a few pictures.) Still, I was about a third of the way finished when I saw *The Manhattan Project* screening. I pretty much liked what I saw, although I hoped that another editing job and added music would help make it more suspenseful. All in all, though, I thought it had merit and would be a big hit. I took my time writing the novelization, doing it in the mornings and then using the afternoons for *StarDate Magazine*.

In retrospect, I think *The Manhattan Project* was probably my best novelization, in that it truly expanded upon the original. One of the problems with the final film had to do with the motivation of the hero, a teenager who manufactures his own atomic bomb for a science project. This comes off well as a concept, and worked for me in the script—but in the film, the actor plays the role a little too shallowly to make you believe that the guy would actually endanger millions to prove something. I compensated in the book with a whole B plot involving the guy's obsessions, hopefully making him more believable. Also, I think that the actual details of nuclear weapons I was able to fit into the book—something that would just bog down a movie—made the result a little deeper. I felt good about the project, and was much more emotionally involved in the film's opening than *WarGames*. Alas, *The Manhattan Project*—er—bombed.

The following year I got a call from Bob Mecoy. By this time, I knew that I was getting typecast into novelizations. Clearly, Avon wanted me to do *Menhattan Project* because of my association with *WarGames*. Both had to do with teenagers—indeed, the reason Bob had suggested me for *WarGames* was because he'd detected a facility for dealing with teens in my books. So now did he have a new teenager gups up the work of government book, I wanted to know.

No. Actually what he had was the new John Hughes movie.

I'd admired Hughes a long time, since his days at *National Lampoon*, in fact. Hughes was responsible for such films as *National Lampoon's Vacation*, *Sixteen Candles*,

*Weird Science*, *The Breakfast Club*, and that paragon of teen movies, *Pretty in Pink*. Seems that Hughes and his marketing folks were very unhappy with ALL the novelizations of his movies -- particularly *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* and *Pretty in Pink*. *Pretty*, though had been a monster hit as a novelization. Every single teenage girl must have bought about five copies. So when Dell bought the new Hughes teen epic, *Some Kind of Wonderful*, the Hughes people wanted to participate in choosing the author of the novelization. After reading a few books offered to them, including *WarGames*, they chose me.

I was pleased and complimented. This was pure boy/girl YA (young adult). I'd never done it before, so it was a challenge. Unfortunately, I had two problems. One was that I was in the middle of doing my part of *Dragonstar Destiny*, a book with Tom Monteleone due very soon (actually late—I had to push it back due to my work on *Judas Cross* with Charles Sheffield.) And Bob Mecoy and Dell Books needed *Wonderful* in exactly one month.

I well remember the evening I went to talk to Tom about the situation. Tom had been pushing me to finish *Dragonstar Destiny* for awhile, and I was in the midst of working on it when I got the *Wonderful* opportunity, which I'd accepted. I was going to tell Tom that I was going to be a little late with my portion, when Tom launched into a very dramatic illustration of how he had recently tried to strangle the director of a recent video effort of his when the director proved difficult and unprofessional. "Nobody does that to me!" Tom said, face red, veins throbbing, his hands around MY throat to show me what he'd done. "Nobody!"

I thought that this was an inopportune time to suggest that I might be late with *Destiny*. Instead, I figured it would be very wise to get both projects in on time.

I should thank Tom. Deadlines, with the emphasis on *dead*, tend to get me working as few things else do. But in order to have the time to finish *Destiny*, I needed to do the novelization as fast as possible.

I did it in three weeks. I got it in a week early, and immediately started work again on *Destiny* getting it in exactly on time as well. (Turned out that Ace didn't really need it—they'd scheduled it for two years and two months later—but they appreciated my getting it in nonetheless.) But this discovery that I could do a novelization this quickly was a valuable piece of information, to me as well as to Dell.

*Some Kind of Wonderful* was a success, and so was the novelization. I did it so quickly, though, that I forgot to put a dedication in it. I guess I should dedicate it to Tom Monteleone. Thanks, Tom!

But this proved to me that I'd really gotten the knack for novelizing a screenplay. Generally, although I write books fairly regularly, I find the process very painful—particularly in the beginning. Every single project is new territory fraught with the possibility of success or failure, insecurity and doubt, plotting problems, characterization difficulties, editorial demands—ewww, I'm getting depressed just thinking of it. But when I novelize, I feel like a real professional. I sit down, I work, it's good. I know it's good. Sure, it's

more craft than inspiration. But it's the occasional zap of inspiration that carries the book over into other territory, that makes it not just a good novelization, but a good book. Also, when I sit down to work on a regular book, there's always the chance that I simply won't get much done, and I'll end up on the couch trying to bury my woes in *All My Children* or comic books. When I work on a novelization, I set a number of pages to get done and by God, I get it done--with maybe more pages on top of the quota. I get to play Robert Silverberg!

Seriously, though, the process works something like this.

First, you have to read the screenplay. Now, the writers of the script did not write the thing to make it easy for the novelist--they wrote it to make a hit movie. But there are certain elements that both novels and scripts have in common. Of course, the basic element they both have, the intersecting point in novelizations and the actual movie--is the dialogue. Generally, I leave the dialogue as it stands, possibly adding to take advantage of the room novels provide for longer speeches. Dialogue is the most enjoyable part of writing for me -- I get to role-play, it goes fast, and it's a natural way of making narrative immediate for the reader.

Also, a screenplay consists of scenes -- the very basis of dramatic grammar for plays, movies, short story, novels, what have you. The key to successful novelizing is to realize that movie scenes work differently than book scenes. A movie sets these scene with a few quick images, almost instantaneously registering with the viewer. Over the decades of film and TV, in fact, the modern audience understands all of the cinematic shorthand that has developed over the years -- it's a universal language that someone from 1900 would take a while to learn. Thus many scenes in movies can start in *media res*, in the middle. There can also be a lot of "cold openings." No prefaces. The background can be filled in with intrinsic images.

The writer however, must work purely with images that he painstakingly creates for the reader--And this takes some time. Oh, sure, you can throw some basic images at the reader, but you have to fill in with the grammar and content of novels. Now, I readily admit that my own novels are just as cinematically influenced as they are literally influenced. I'm a Glass-Teat baby. I love movies. So I'm a step ahead in that way. Nonetheless, there is so much that movies leave unsaid, things that are implicit in the images and dialogue, that the novelist must either spell out or make up. A scene that may take only 45 seconds to illustrate on the screen may involve five or six pages of prose.

Also, character situations can be set up in books. Thus, the novelist can create whole scenes not in the movie that will give the result of his efforts a more novelistic feel. This is probably the second-most fun part of the process. You already have your characters--you just fill them out and play with them a bit. This also helps a great deal when you realize that if you just play the screenplay as it stands, you'd end up about a hundred

pages short of the 200-250 pages that make a novel.

The most fun part of novelizing though, is when you're actually working with a scene that you have to fill out. Actually just typing out a series of dialogue as the screenwriters have written it is very boring. But when you play with the dialogue and the other things between the dialogue--exposition, narrative, description, etc.--then it's what I call literary jamming. A kind of jazz for the computer keyboard.

When I write a scene in a normal novel, sometimes it flows very nicely, going just where I want it or even discovering new territory in plot, action and character interaction. This doesn't always happen though. In fact, what differentiates the writer who can work every day, and the writer who relies on these wonderful flows of inspiration is the simple ability to *write even though you don't feel inspired*. You might dub this "writing in the left side of the brain." Every once in a while the old right side will wake up, make a few terrific suggestions, and then commence its loud

in particular helped me cut out a tendency toward verbosity, particularly in description.

One of the most important contributions a novelist can make though, is creating point of view. Some scenes have so much going on that you have to take an omniscient or limited omniscient stance, playing stage manager as all the events unwind, explaining them when necessary. Novels, however, are far more successful than movies at getting into the character's heads. Thus when I do an average scene in a novelization, I select a character and tell the story from his point of view, throwing in his or her actual thoughts and impressions from time to time. This is probably the most vital part of getting the novelistic feel to a scene written for a film--and a key part of filling out the characterizations.

Another important part of creating scenes is the process of beginning and ending them. Beginnings and endings of novel scenes must have the proper feel to them, some sense of ROUNDNESS, like a well-designed bit of architecture. Where you begin and end with dialogue, action,



snoring. But you really can't rely on the flickle fellow.

When you write a scene from a screenplay, though, this acts as that voice of inspiration. That leaves your natural abilities free to take the main line of melody and improvise. This is also why I can produce more pages in a given day when I novelize. If I get tired, I just put in a few lines of dialogue, with easy "he saids" or "she saids" -- and suddenly I'm recharged and can go on for a while longer. Too often after six pages or so of a normal novel, you dig into your well of creativity and discover that there's not much left for the day. I try and follow Hemingway's dictum to leave something in that well for the next day to get going. But that means ending the writing day early--with a novelization, you've always got something in the well.

It also helps that by the time it gets to me, the script has been rewritten numerous times, and it's polished. Fortunately, this not only affects your own writing--it frees up your self-confidence. I did some narrative things in *WarGames* that I'd never attempted before--and now I can do them in my own books. *WarGames*

description or whatever, it has to have the correct wording to create the correct matrix of emotion, as well as physical and literary impressions. Comedians call it timing. Saying what you have to say at just the right moment to maximize its effect. This is a skill that takes a lot of practice -- and I wonder if maybe it's a talent as much as a skill, something that you really can't learn, and just must have. This is one of those areas where sheer craftsmanship can spill over into more theoretical and aesthetic literary territory.

It was pure craftsmanship, though, that got me through my next novelizing assignment, a remake of *The Blob*, due as of this writing for release in August 1988. It's a movie that falls squarely into science fictional and horror fields that I've been plowing lately.

I wasn't sure that I was going to get *The Blob*. Bob Mecoy had told me about it just before he left Dell to become executive paperback editor at NAL. Chuck Adams wanted to buy it--Dell had just done well with Ed Naha's version of *Robocop*, so it seemed like a good bet. The problem, as it often is, was a matter of scheduling. One of the bane of the tie-in publishing

business is that the marketing people in LA seem to have no idea about the scheduling situation in publishing. Thus, sometimes although a publisher may really want to do a novelization of a movie, there's simply no time to get the project done. Actually, it's not really people from LA's fault--things can happen much faster in the movie business than the book business. I'll give you two excellent examples.

When *Bantam did Pretty in Pink*, they based the book on the version of the movie they bought in script form. Briefly, the movie deals with an idiosyncratic teenager (Molly Ringwald) whose best friend, Duck, is a funny outcast whose love has turned romantic. But then a handsome prep in school asks Molly out, and Molly falls hard. The prep's buddies ostracize him for associating with a girl from the wrong side of the tracks like Molly, so he dumps her. Now, in the original movie version, Molly gives the finger to this good-looking bozo and goes to the prom with Duck, looking "pretty in pink" with a dress she made herself. But when this version was shown to test audiences of pubescent females, the screeching was almost deafening. They all identified with Molly--and would much rather see her end up with the handsome prep in Hughes and company had to quickly refilm a new ending--one where the prep gets Molly. A wise move--the movie was a solid hit, I strongly suspect that Hughes was upset about this, since it didn't really get across what he wanted, so he wrote *Some Kind of Wonderful*, which is another version of *Pretty in Pink*, only with a guy as the protagonist. I prefer *Wonderful* myself, though I admit I'm prejudiced.) However, this quick change left Bantam in a lurch. They'd novelized the original ending, and that was the way they kept it: In the end, Duck gets Molly! Everything worked out okay for both Bantam and the Hughes people--but I don't doubt this raised some consternation in both camps.

Another example involved me and my novelization of *Some Kind of Wonderful*. After turning in the book, I got a call from Bob Mecoy. Everything was fine, but there'd been some changes. A couple of scenes had been reshotted for the film, and I had to rewrite those scenes. I got the new scenes via Express Mail and the new chapters went back Express Mail as well, so they got inserted okay. More amusing was a scene which I believe was actually rewritten by John Hughes himself. One of the characters in *Wonderful* is Drummer Girl, who loves Keith the hero, who is her best friend but only has eyes for the high school beauty. In the script, Drummer Girl breezes into a rock club looking for Keith and listens to the band a few moments. In my version, Drummer Girl finds the band very lacking in comparison to her own musical abilities. Little did I know that the band that would be used in the movie, The March Violets, was being promoted by the Hughes Entertainment music branch. (The *Pretty in Pink* soundtrack was a big hit and ever since, the Hughes People have ingeniously used their movies to market music and groups.) So when the book came out, I found my words changed to a favorable impression of The March Violets--and very well written words they

were too! Bob Mecoy thought that maybe Hughes had written them himself, and I don't doubt it--they're consistent with the rest of the language of the script.) Hooray for Hollywood!

Anyway, back to *The Blob*. Chuck Adams had me slated for the project--if Dell won the rights. But Tri-Star, the movie company, was taking a long time to set up an auction date, reducing the amount of production time available for the book. Now, the average production time for your average novel, folks, is nine months. Publishers can reduce this all the way to a week if necessary--but the cost escalates at a horrendous ratio. Thus, if you have to do a book in a few months, this wipes out a lot of the profit margin. Thus, in order to make money, a publisher has got to have a movie project deal firmed up a long time before the movie comes up. And with *The Blob*, time was getting short. You can see that in this situation the length of time it will take a writer to write the novelization can be a vital factor in whether the publisher can hope for profit.

I was quite aware of this. I wanted *The Blob*. The screenplay was truly a hot item--the movie promised to be the horror summer hit of 1988. A twenty million dollar film, and the only major star is going to be Mr. Blob himself. Whew. I can hardly wait to see it. Anyway, I told Chuck that if time had anything to do with his decision, that I could do the novelization in two weeks. I would never have made that offer if I hadn't been forced to do *Wonderful* in three weeks.

Then the release date was moved up from August to June. The other interested publishers dropped out of the bidding--no way they could produce the book in time. But Chuck, mindful that I'd be willing to write it in two weeks (and on pure trust--contracts with publishers take weeks to process) stuck in there and got the rights. (It was a touch-and-go situation, though, coming within a DAY of failing through). Chuck called me on a Tuesday morning. I immediately started to work.

Now, I've heard of writers who have written books in a couple of days. Generally, though, this is such a mind-killer that the creative process rebels, and demands long periods of rest between these gargantuan efforts--and occasional crash-and-burn writing blocks. Fortunately, I am quite simply incapable of such an effort. I've learned to follow the turtle's advice in the race against the rabbit--slow, but steady. You take a 220-page manuscript and it looks like a lot of work. But even if you only write four pages a day, five days a week, that's twenty pages a week, and your novel is done in under three months. (Fred Pohl, I hear, writes at least four pages a day every day of the week.) So it's really all a matter of dividing a task into small, accomplishable bits, and deal with each bit as it comes day by day. I figured that if I wrote fifteen pages a day, I could get *The Blob* done. The bad news was that the book turned out to be about thirty-four pages longer than I thought it would; the good news was that I had a few twenty page days and one thirty-one page day.

I turned the book in a day early.

To bad I can't write a book that quickly

normally, but still it was not a really pleasant experience. I never worked more than six to eight hours a day (not including breaks, which were very necessary) but still by the time I was finished, I was pretty drained. I'm quite happy with the job I did, though I wish I had had more time to play around with new scenes. I don't know what I would have done without a Thesaurus for this one though--I constantly needed new words like "slimy" and "viscous" to describe the hero, Mr. Blob. Nonetheless, the experience wasn't really a bad one--and it did imitate a writing fantasy I've always had, the fantasy of long sittings at the keyboard, in a different state of consciousness, totally immersed in a sea of story, writing, writing, writing. Unfortunately, much as I admire writers like Jack Chalker, Robert Silverberg, and Caroline Cherryh for their facile ease at production and their formidable hard work, each day of writing for me is some form of struggle. Only deadlines can rouse me from torpor into steady output.

Still, I think *The Blob*, as a novel, stands pretty well on its own as a nasty little horror book.

Now, one of the questions I get most often is: what's the use of a novelization? Well, what's the use of any book? As I hope I've made clear, a novelization is generally rather different from the movie, since it's not really based on the movie itself, but rather the screenplay. And here is the final reason why I enjoy novelizing.

I've got this secret ambition, you see. I've always wanted to write films. I've done a couple of screenplays, and did some professional scriptwork while I was in Los Angeles for TV as well. (The subject of a separate column, perhaps?) But what I'd really like to do is direct movies.

Needless to say, this is quite a lofty ambition, one that very few people get--and at which only a few are actually successful. But when I get a screenplay to novelize, in my own way, I have to become a director as well as a writer. It becomes MY movie--I get a proprietary feeling for it. I cast it, light it, select the costumes and scenery. I cut it and score it to my own private prose rhythms. It has an opening night, and it succeeds or fails.

One of these days maybe I'll actually get a shot at really directing a movie. But for the time being, novelizing satisfies that secret craving.

Another nice bonus is that a successful novelization will sell a lot more books than the average novel. People that read and like my novelizations might actually buy other books of mine. It's a nice form of publicity. And where else can you advertise yourself--and get royalties to boot?

To conclude, I should say that by no means would I enjoy novelizing exclusively. I think that my enjoyment of the form shows through in the writing and if I had to do too many, the books would lose that quality.

But one or maybe even two a year I could handle easily.

You hear that, Hollywood? Editors, are you out there? Send me scripts! Lights! Camera! Word Processor! NOVELIZATION! □

Sometimes you find pieces of yourself. Sometimes you're drawn to a cabinet, or forced to open an old cardboard box -- or you give an interview. The interviewer asks questions you can't answer by rote. You have to think about them. You have to ask yourself the same questions. And with a shock, you have a realization about yourself: you've found a missing piece because someone asked you for it. You learn things about yourself, giving interviews; you see patterns previously hidden to you. It's a strange, unexpected therapy.

Some Canadian magazine recently asked for an interview-by-mail as the basis for a profile on me, with the emphasis on my horror novels. Answering the questions, I was carried away, and gave them a lot more than they could use -- I was carried away by the process of self-realization. It happens every time I give an interview, and maybe it's significant to me because most of the time I live in a sort of chronological fog. I don't carry my past with me as most people do. When it springs out at me, it's always a surprise.

So here's the stuff I sent them -- most of which they won't be quoting for their short profile -- sans the questions, except where I've paraphrased them in brief for clarity. I hope it sheds some light on one SF writer's stumbling, roundabout journey to maturity.

My full name is John Patrick Shirley, I was born in Houston, Texas in 1953 but grew up mostly in California and Oregon. My father died when I was ten, which may be why I think about the Great Punchline, Death, so often. I went to McNary High in Salem, Oregon but was expelled from school (after being suspended a record number of times) for locking a teacher in the closet and taking over the class. I'm not particularly proud of that, but not ashamed of it either. I did it as a joke, I didn't hurt her; and possibly the real reason I was expelled was because I distributed a high school underground newspaper, something I edited and wrote most of, called "The Phoenix Rising From the Ashes." It was highly critical of the school and of the Vietnam war, etc., etc. Actually I started doing that sort of thing when I was 12, publishing a junior high school underground paper (mimeographed) called "The Sniper" -- the school paper was called "The Piper." I have had scarcely any jobs. A few times I worked doing "temp" jobs and once I had a job for about five months as a sort of secretary/typist for a New York PR firm, during which time I discovered just how amazingly much of the "news" in the paper and on TV is in fact planted by PR firms. I was fired for writing at work.

As a teenager and in my early 20s I lived off Social Security I wasn't really supposed to be getting -- essentially I was defrauding the government. I have since paid them back for it. They made an accounting error in my favor and sent me too much money one month, and I used it to pay for attendance at the Clarion Writer's Workshop. I think I was about 19. My teachers were Harlan Ellison, Ursula LeGuin, Avram Davidson, Terry Carr, Robert Silverberg, and Vonda McIntyre. Ellison sent one of my first stories to the

## MAKE IT SCREAM

"A Writer Meets Himself"



John Shirley

Clarion anthology and they published it in an NAL book, *Clarion III*. My first professional sale. Since then I've lived off writing, or... Ah, well, there was a period when I had some illicit occupations I cannot discuss with you. It wasn't legitimate work. I was young then, essentially a juvenile delinquent. I was habitually antiauthoritarian, rather self indulgently, and that simply made it impossible for me to attend college. I am an autodidact. I was taking drugs in those days -- I usually avoid them now -- and they made me even more unschoolarable and unemployable.

I am now married to Kathleen Woods-Shirley. I have been married several times,

once to Jay Rothbell, who is now Jay Sheckley (having been married to Robert Sheckley after me), and who is an up and coming horror writer herself. Kathy is studying Law. I intend to stay married to her for good. I was also married to a French artist, Alexandra Allinne, and lived in France with her about 1981-82, in Paris and the south of France, part of the reason much of *Eclipse* is set in France. Alexandra and I had identical twin boys, Byron and Perry. They are happy young frogs in her care, and speak only French. Besides paying child support and looking at their pictures I have all too little connection with them now, which is a great burden on me. I see them only a few times a year. Cruel circumstances converged on that marriage and left it in ruins -- I absolutely could not remain with her in France. Even so, the guilt of leaving the boys preyed on me, led me to a swampland of depression and eventually a nervous breakdown. It still gnaws at me, but I've learned to deal with it. It helps that I have a son with Kathy, Julian, who is a year and a half at this writing. I live now in Alameda, California. I came here to escape from the grime of Big City Life. I liked cities more as a young man, but at 35 they have worn me down and defeated me. Also I can't abide smog.

I have written compulsively as long as I can remember. I told stories when I was a kid to the other kids. I would tell them that I'd had a vivid dream -- and then I'd make the whole thing up. I think there are people who are intended genetically as storytellers, no doubt filling some kind of sociobiological niche, and I am one. The first story I remember putting down was published in a high school underground paper (not my own). The fact that someone published the story encouraged me; a publication in a "grown up" underground paper, "The Stranger," encouraged me further. Seeing my name in print. The underground paper milieu in those days was a fertile field, and wide open, and doubtless helped lots of writers get their chops. I began writing SF and horror because I read too much SF and horror. Terry Carr, who'd encouraged me at Clarion, published me in *Universe* and then asked me to write a book for some wretched series he was doing for, I think, "Laser" books. At some point the book, called *Changeworld*, was lost or destroyed before publication. I don't recall how it was lost, but this was probably the act of a benevolent god for which we should all be grateful. *Transmeniacon* is at least partly strung together of several very strange novellas (or novellas) which I had been unable to sell. They were either too offbeat or too rough in quality. I correctly guessed that I stood a better chance of getting the stories into print if they were part of a novel, as there were many more markets for novels. And I BELIEVED in those stories. So I wove them together -- and the book took on a life of its own. I think it works on its own merits. The title comes from a Blue Oyster Cult song. This was my first published novel. Zebra books bought it for \$1500, and for this pittance bought all rights to it FOREVER. Thus it remains out of print. They also bought my next two novels, *Dracula in Love* and *Three Ring Psychus* for the same price and with the same

boilerplate conditions. Roy Torgeson was the editor, but it wasn't his fault. He was working for greedy parasites. I was young and foolish -- I'm still foolish -- and knew no better. I didn't understand contracts except for two things: The part where my signature went, and the part that had the money in it. It was a lot of money for me then. I was living in crash pads, sleeping in sleeping bags, and eating spaghetti noodles plain. Now I spend twice the advance I got for a Zebra book in a month -- or sometimes over a weekend.

*Dracula in Love* was an adolescent power fantasy, in some ways, but it had much to redeem it. It was my first horror novel -- I've never been good at writing classic horror short stories -- and it was also a mystical fantasy adventure. I rather pretentiously called my books "Visionary Adventures" in those days.

I wrote these and my fourth book -- the fourth one was *City Come A-Walkin'* -- out of the hot springs of sheer inspiration.

But I was reading less and less SF, was impatient with my progress in it, and seemed to see a sort of maze-trap of ghettoized genre writing stretching ahead of me. I thought: Break into the mainstream, or at least out of SF, before it's too late. So I wrote *The Brigade* which my agent sold to Avon Books. (I have had numerous agents -- most of them nearly went mad. I was hard to deal with. I was testy and always kibitzing -- my attitude was, and still is: Hey, this is my life you're marketing. I have a right to make suggestions about how you go about it.) *The Brigade* was a psychokiller story about a town that gets rid of its inept police, and decides to police itself with vigilantes. Only the guy who organized the vigilante "brigade" is actually a psychokiller. There are subplots making it a rather Kafkuesque tale. Some people -- Lew Shiner and Ed Bryant -- think it's one of my best books.

Suddenly my relationship with publishing changed -- I was no longer writing books out of inspiration. I was writing them because it seemed the appropriate commercial project at the time, or because an editor asked for "something along the lines of (fill in the blank)." *Cellars*, for example, I wrote because the editors at Avon said horror was getting hot. It came quite naturally; I'd always read the stuff -- I liked Poe and Machen and some of Lovecraft and Richard Matheson and Ray Bradbury's scarier stories -- and because I'm a morbid bastard anyway. I think of life itself as something fairly nightmarish. Something we're subjected to. And I never go more than a half hour without thinking about Death. So I said, "No problem." I set the story in New York because I was living there and perceived it to be a scary place. There are vast systems of tunnels under NYC, everything from old subway tunnels to old steam tunnels to utility tunnels and sewers, and it seemed an ideal breeding ground for some horror. I hadn't read much contemporary horror -- only one King book -- so the book isn't very up-to-date or carefully put together with respect to horror crafting. But my twisted imagination triumphed, and New York City was a great inspiration, so the novel did well and still has a good reputation as a scary book. People regularly report to me that it made them ill or gave them bad dreams. A good

sign.

The first draft of *In Darkness Walting* was written about then, but I had a falling out with Avon and they wanted nothing more to do with me. I was a person of rough edges, even more than now, and rather abrasive. I was basically a street kid, you see, fresh from the world of drugs and other kinds of sordidness, and not very well adapted to the social realities of the business world. And when they had the temerity to ACTUALLY CHARGE ME for the enormous number of changes I made in the page proofs, I went through the roof. They ought to be PAYING ME EXTRA for those changes, I said. I think I called them pickpockets or something of the sort and swore at them. Then I was surprised when they dropped me. Strange. "What's eating THEM?" I wondered innocently. I had problems like this for years, acting like a street sleaze around editors and agents, till I figured out I was hurting myself. There are still some people who won't deal with me as a result of my behavior in those days, though I'm more polite and more polished now. You have to understand, I was in the early days the lead singer of several punk bands. I was a punk, it was the way to be then, for me it was the only honest attitude, I thought. It was a mistake in terms of a publishing career, but the gigs were fun, though occasionally I had bottles broken over my head and had to have stitches. I was the lead singer of a band called *Sado Nation*, on the Park Avenue label, and another one called *OBSESSION* which made a record on the Celuloid label. So that cultural hue, and the drugs, and my streetish background made my career a rough one.

Jim Frenkel had bought my novel *City Come A-Walkin'* at Dell, and wanted to do something else with me at Bluejay. I pitched the *Eclipse* concept at him and he said, "Why not do it as a trilogy?" And it made sense to me because it was a global, vast sort of story. To Frenkel it was a marketing consideration. I didn't understand then the marketing scam that trilogies represent. Meanwhile, *In Darkness Walting*, which was originally called *Insect Inside* (a title I still prefer) was just knocking around, unpublished. Too damn sloppy, in that draft.

After the first *Eclipse* book, there were strange delays at Bluejay -- slow editorial responses to the second *Eclipse* book, even slower to issue the check. Stories of their not delivering books to retailers. I saw the writing on the wall, and wasn't surprised when Bluejay folded. Frenkel had been overambitious.

Eventually we sold *Eclipse* and *Eclipse Penumbra* to Questar/Popular Library (who're also bringing out the third book, *Eclipse Corona*). And then Charles Platt bought *A Splendid Chaos* for Franklin Watts, and I painstakingly rewrote *Insect Inside* for John Silbersack who wanted a horror novel for his new Signet Onyx line. But the Signet sales department, who are the real editors nowadays, wanted a new title. I gave them *In Darkness Walting*. The sales department's feverish second-guessers are twits, and we're their whimpering poodles. My first few books were written out of sheer, whimsical, uneven inspiration; the subsequent books were written because the editors asked me

for specific types of things, but they happened to be the types of things, usually, that my inspiration worked with. *A Splendid Chaos* sold out its hardcover edition; *In Darkness Walting* is in its second printing.

Will I branch out further? I intend to write a mainstream novel, to continue to write movies, and to write a horror novel I have in mind called *The Users*. The SF field makes me claustrophobic, perhaps because I'm not a Libertarian crypto-fascist.

What was underlying *Cellars*? It was written as a sort of anti-travelogue on New York City, and in order to make certain social criticisms. Not that I don't like New York, I do, but the piece is aquiver with events like a paranoid's teeming brain; it is a miasma of influences and atmospheres. It is predacious and addictive. It most definitely has an "underbelly." It is a place that grinds people up. It also exalts and inspires people. And I found it inspirational for a horror novel. When I wrote *Cellars* we were in the throes of the "Me Decade" -- a Decade which apparently is lasting twenty years, or more. Everyone is acting like they're in an overcrowded lifeboat. *Cellars* was a book about exploitation, about people exploiting people, making them into cattle. It's no accident that the hideous human sacrifices performed in the book, the offering up to the Head Below, were rewarded with financial benefit, or career benefit. Of course, people have always attempted to use Black Magic for their material gain (with no genuine success -- for the record, I do not believe in the supernatural), but *Cellars* I set it up as a sort of underground contemporary institution, like a savings and loan, so that the horror became banal and therefore more horrible.

It was a jape of New York itself, of its perpetual self- cannibalism, the casual willingness of people to climb onto the backs of others, breaking those backs in the process . . . "When that heroin's my blood, and that blood is in my head, thank God I'm as good as Dead, thank God I'm not aware, of all the evil in this town, and everyone putting everyone else down, and all the dead bodies piled up in mounds . . .": Lou Reed.

*Cellars* (which is coming out again in a limited, illustrated edition) is also about dealing with guilt, and about our sense of being abandoned in a world we've lost control of; it's about the city as an entity grown beyond our comprehension, a Frankenstein's monster that we live within. And I wanted to create horrors that were more horrible by reason of greater infusions of the imagination. I think I achieved that ahead of Clive Barker, if not as skillfully. I also wanted to render a naturalistic portrait of New York, between the horror bits, that would resonate with verisimilitude.

Writing *In Darkness Walting*, I used a technique similar to that in *The Brigade*, except that I added a supernatural element. In both books we have an isolated town, rather small, which we first describe and then ring changes in on, for a sense of trapped disorientation and for maximum control in our microcosm. I probably picked this technique up from John Wyndham, another horror influence.

Thematically the book is about dehumanization. It's an allegory about the way we all-too-easily abstract people into THINGS -- racially, socially, or through outright hatred -- in order to make it easier to dispose of them. In some ways this relates to the theme in *Cellars*; it's the next logical step -- the step down to the cellars.

In *Darkness Waiting* (or *Insect Inside*, if you prefer), someone discovers that certain people, all through the ages, carry within them the capacity to become insectlike in their ruthlessness to the degree that it begins to change them physically, so that they produce strange insectlike sub-beings which can break free of them and infect others with this monstrous ruthlessness and cruelty, a consciousness where sadism seems logical and necessary. It happens to the whole town, bit by bit. I don't believe anything of this sort is going on literally -- but metaphorically, we are capable of becoming insects inside when it's convenient to us. The Nazis were just human beings, caught up in a depraved state of consciousness. The book asks: How could the Nazis bring themselves to bayonet, to machine gun, to gas small children? To tear children from their parents and murder them like sheep? To torture children in front of their parents?

The Nazis weren't the end of it. 500,000 people have been systematically murdered in Uganda -- and this is since Idi Amin's departure. Horribly butchered. And we cannot be self-righteous in the States -- the CIA is the Great Instructor for torture. CIA torture experts taught "interrogation techniques" to torturers in Argentina, Chile, Guatemala and El Salvador. The CIA has given aid and comfort to the Death Squads who've butchered thousands of innocent people in Central and South America, and elsewhere. We could talk about the atrocities in Vietnam, which were not so long ago. Napalm on villages, cooking children alive. Other men sell crack to ten year olds, destroying them effortlessly and without hesitation. Crack dealers KNOW what they're doing to people. The point is, how can people bring themselves to do these things? What CHANGES in them? How do they suppress their empathy? In *Darkness Waiting* offers an allegorical answer to those questions. Of course, it's an entertainment first -- an attempt to tease the reader into a state of transcendent paranoia so that they wonder at the things that might be hidden in their friends and family; so that they wonder what's hidden in their own dark corners; so that they're afraid of what might be in their own darkness, waiting.

The *A Song Called Youth* trilogy -- which I prefer to call *The Eclipse Books* -- is a political/military thriller set in the near future, warning about a political mindset into which we could be sliding and about the danger of a return of fascism. It is not a "the German Nazis come back" book. It is about the kind of fascism, the particular brand, we are most likely to encounter: One part National Front jingoism, one part Fundamentalist Christian narrowmindedness, one part KKK-type racism and one part bogus-sociobiology racism. (I believe there is something to sociobiology, but it's a dangerous science which could be

mis-used by racists, could be distorted to seem to mean something it doesn't really mean.) When I was in France I saw that the Front National, the new French fascist party, was growing more and more powerful. It is now a major force in French politics. Its leader, Le Pen, claims that the Holocaust didn't really happen, and advocates French apartheid. I see similar movements elsewhere in Europe and the potential for them here. And the potential for horror within them. I am also writing the books -- *Eclipse*, *Eclipse Penumbra*, and *Eclipse Corona* -- to be an honest portrait of ordinary life in the near future, both on Earth and in a hypothetical O'Neill type artificial-world space colony. *Eclipse* is an ode to the idealism of youth, too; it's about how absurd it is and how divine it is, how the song called *Youth* goes on and on, seeming new each time it's played, in all the incarnations of rock 'n' roll...

It's difficult to be didactic without being dull. The only way to get a message across without preaching is to preach it mostly to the unconscious of the reader, using symbols, using parable, and using character. The characters undergo epiphanies and we learn with them. It has to be all of a piece, one unit: character and story and theme. One symmetrical tapestry -- though it's necessarily asymmetrical at times. Life bumps and shudders with anomalies.

I have no definite Shirley bibliography at hand. I wrote numerous other books under pseudonyms, but they don't count -- they were action adventure novels written in three weeks apiece because I needed the money. They had numbers on them. So and So #3, etc. I disown them. There's one potboiler I WILL cop to: *The Black Hole of Carcosa* (St. Martin's Press). It's based on characters created by Michael Reaves in his book *Darkworld Detective*. What you have to understand is, this book is humorous. It's a satire.

My early books were often brain-twistingly grotesque. My friends in those days were "freaks" à la Zappa and Beethoven and we had a kind of "Weirdness

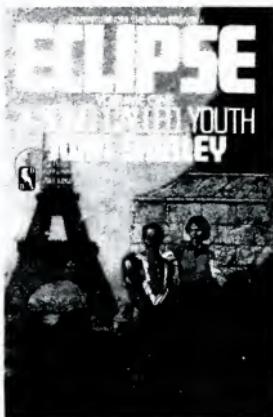
Macho" to live up to. *Transmaniacon*, *Dracula In Love* and *Three Ring Psychus* live up to it. So does *A Splendid Chaos* -- but the reviewer in LOCUS, who gave the book a great review, was nonetheless wrong about one thing: it wasn't a rewrite of a book from that period. *A Splendid Chaos* is all new -- a new return to my surreal roots.

I used to reach for a combination of powerful imagery and racing plot. Now, I'm equally interested in developing character, and in stories where the plot emerges from the nature of the characters. I've always tried for an appropriate and highly controlled style, a musical style, something that evokes a sort of background score as you're reading, but sometimes -- as I'm a compulsively fast writer -- I fall short of my goal. I revise a lot now, but in the early days I often sent a story out without even re-reading it. I was so feverish about things then. I'd tear it out of the typewriter, slap it, hands shaking, into the envelope and RUN with it to the post office. Cackling all the way. THIS'll get 'em! Sometimes it did and sometimes it didn't. Now I force myself to put it away, reread it later. And revise ruthlessly.

Rhythm is very important to me, in story pacing and sentence structure. I write in scenes, and try to evoke cinematic imagery in the reader's mind. If I have to summarize or synopsize I try to do it entertainingly. In the early days I wrote almost like "automatic writing" -- I was influenced more by the surrealists, and I tried to get a fusion of input from the unconscious and the rational mind. I have seen people wearing buttons that read "Question Authority." In my fiction I wanted readers to Question Reality itself. To question their perceptions. I thought this was the way to higher consciousness and to insight; I sometimes used Dalí's Paranoid Critical Method, describing commonplace things as if they were alien. Looking at things we know as if we've never seen them before. You'll find much of this in *A Splendid Chaos* combined with some very nittygritty descriptions -- a cohesion of old and new techniques. But mostly now I work within the confines of the real world, or an extrapolation of it. Far from indulging in "automatic writing", my writing now is increasingly controlled -- I go for controlled madness. Orchestrated apocalypse.

What would I like to see in publishing? Less categorization, less emphasis on formulaic, "safe" themes, a greater emphasis on character and quality in general in the SF field, more tolerance for outside viewpoints, less emphasis on so-called sympathetic characters. This insistence on so-called "sympathetic characters" is a racist, classist criterion leaving us with characters who're a bunch of predictable, middleclass, Spielberg yuppies. Fuck that.

Scream Press is releasing my first collection of stories, *Heartseeker*. The stories span 1973 to 1988. Proofing it, I wonder at the perversity of my imagination, at times, the pain it implies. But the glory is there too. The chord is there, shimmering. The glory of love, Lou Reed tells us, comes shining through.



### Postscript and Pompous Afterthoughts:

I wrote the following for a friend of mine in the process of writing her first novel:

**THESE SACRED COMMANDMENTS ...** channelled through John Shirley, came up from on low, from the Holy Copywriter, who guides you, an apprentice mosquito, to the Conspiracy's Throbbing Mainline...in order to better DRAIN THE LIFEFLUID from the Evil Conspiracy (blood in the form of royalties, residuals, etc.) through the sacred parasitism we call "being a writer" you must adhere to the following commandments. (They're also useful for getting good reviews.)

**\*\*THOU SHALT REVISE OR CUT ALL AWKWARD SENTENCES. TRULY, I SAY UNTO YOU, ALL YOUR SENTENCES MUST FLOW, AND YOU MUST HAVE A SENSE OF SENTENCE RHYTHM. CLUNKINESS WILT THOU SHUN OR VERILY YOU WILL LOOK LIKE A SCHMUCK IN THE EYES OF MY HEAVENLY HOSTS AND EDITORS.**

**\*\*THOU SHALT SHUN TRITENESS OR Clichés IN DESCRIPTION OR STORY; IN ALL THINGS STRIVE FOR ORIGINALITY. THOU SHALT TURN AWAY FROM SITUATIONS COMMON TO COMIC BOOKS, MOVIES, OR POP NOVELS: THEY ARE THE WORK OF THE EVIL ONE.**

**\*\*THOU SHALT ELIMINATE ALL UNNECESSARY WORDS OR PHRASES FROM THY SENTENCES.**

**\*\*THOU SHALT USE WORDS WITH A COGNIZANCE OF THEIR PROPER MEANING: THOU SHALT BE WARY OF MALAPROPSMS.**

**\*\*THOU SHALT NOT CONFUSE THY READERS, NOR LEAD THEM UNTO THE PATH OF AMBIGUITY FOR THY EGO'S SAKE. THOU SHALT NOT MAKE THEM STOP AND BLINK IN BAFFLEMENT, OR SHRUG. THOU SHALT STRIVE FOR CLARITY, YEA, EVEN MOODY OR POETIC EFFECTS MUST THOU FOUND ON LUCIDITY. FOR IN VAGUENESS LIETH DISHONESTY.**

**\*\*THOU SHALT ADVANCE THE STORY WITH A PROPER PACING AND SUSPENSE, AND YET, IN THY INSECURITY, THOU MUST NOT DIZZY THY READER.**

**\*\*THOU SHALT NOT MISTAKE RAZZLE-DAZZLE FOR INTENSITY; NOR INDULGE IN CORNY PYROTECHNICS FOR VERILY THEY ARE PUERILE, UNLESS SATIRICAL OR MASTERFULLY CONTROLLED. THOU SHALT NOT SHOW OFF, FOR THEREIN LIES THE ROAD TO YAWNS.**

**\*\*THOU SHALT NOT ATTEMPT TO DESCRIBE CHARACTERS BEYOND THY EXPERIENCE, UNLESS IN PURE FANTASY, OR AFTER FORTY DAYS AND FORTY NIGHTS OF RESEARCH; OR VERILY WITH GREAT CAUTION AND RESTRAINT; DITTO, I SAY UNTO YOU, REGARDING PLACES UNKNOWN TO YOU.**

**\*\*THOU SHALT REMEMBER THAT ALL VIOLENCE, HORROR, OR OTHER KINDS OF CHARGED IMAGERY MUST VERILY BE**

**EXPERTLY SET UP AND PREPARED FOR: THOU SHALT ESTABLISH VERISIMILITUDE, AND BACKGROUND REALISM AND THUS A SENSE OF PLACE.**

**\*\*THOU SHALT BE OPEN MINDED TO EDITORIAL SUGGESTIONS, AND FLEXIBLE, AND YET SHALT THOU ESHCWE WIMPINESS.** □

## EDITORIAL Continued From Page 4

**THRUST** got 32 of 326 total nominations. I assume that all 32 of you who nominated **THRUST** are reading this, so thank you once again.

My only reasonable goal this year was to NOT lose to the dreaded *No Award*. My more ambitious, but potentially achievable, goal was to place third or fourth, beating out *Interzone* and/or *Aboriginal SF*. I barely achieved the former goal, and didn't even come close on the latter.

On the first ballot, only 44 of 815 ballots cast voted **THRUST** number one, seven less than the 51 who chose *No Award* first. Ouch. (Of the 44 of you who picked **THRUST** first, ten of you picked *Interzone* as your second choice, seven picked *SFC*, six *Locus*, five *Aboriginal SF*, and four *No Award*.) **THRUST** didn't beat out *No Award* until the third ballot, but did very well on the third, fourth and fifth rounds after *Locus*, *SFC* and *Aboriginal SF* votes were dropped. Still, the closest **THRUST** got to not coming in last was losing fourth place to *Interzone* on the fourth ballot by 329 to 188. Not really close.

Looking at the bright side, this year's tally leaves plenty of room for improvement next year. Also, I noted that if voting had been prorated by circulation, **THRUST** may have had a chance. In fact, I think the final voting order might just be the same as if voting had been based on total sales in 1987. (The only possible anomaly is *Aboriginal SF*, which now outsells both *Locus* and *SFC* per issue.) Not too surprising, I guess.

But here's an interesting fact that I decided not to bring up until after the voting: **THRUST** was the only nominee for best semiprozine that actually fit the criteria for eligibility for that Hugo category! The constitution of the World Science Fiction Society defines the category, under Article II, Section 10, as follows:

**Best Semiprozine: Any generally available non-professional publication devoted to science fiction or fantasy which has published four (4) or more issues, at least one (1) of which appeared in the previous calendar year, and which in the previous calendar year met at least two (2) of the following criteria: (1) had an average press run of at least one thousand (1000) copies per issue, (2) paid its contributors and/or staff in other than copies of the publication, (3) provided at least half the income of any one person, (4) had at least fifteen percent (15%) of its total space occupied by advertising, or (5) announced itself to be a semiprozine.**

Now go back to the beginning and note that all semiprozines must be "non-professional". Nowhere in the constitution is the term defined, but the relevant definition of "professional" in my dictionary is, "participating for gain in an activity engaged in by amateurs." Of this year's

nominees, *Locus*, *SFC* and *Aboriginal SF* are clearly *non-professional*.

*Interzone*'s status is only in question because I understand they receive grants from the U.K. government; otherwise, they are clearly a professional SF magazine, a major market in England. Only **THRUST** can clearly be considered to be a non-professional magazine—and even with me, it's not for lack of trying.

And lest anyone argue that "non-professional" is not an important qualifier to the definition, note that without it (and to some degree even with it), virtually any publishing product in the field is eligible—every prozine, every anthology series, every line of books, all comic books, you name it. Unlike the fanzine category, which specifically excludes anything eligible for the semiprozine award, the Best Semiprozine category does not exclude publications whose editors are eligible for the Best Professional Editor award.

This was, I'm sure, just a case of bad drafting. The semiprozine category was, after all, created just to get *Locus* out of the fanzine category. Yet the definition was written to clearly exclude *Locus*.

I'd be interested in hearing from our readership. What should be done (if anything) to fix this situation where most of the official nominees—including the only magazine to ever win the award—are not eligible according to the reasonably clear definition in the Worldcon Constitution? Redefine the categories? Add a Best Prozine category? (After all, the best editor may not be the same as the best magazine—other factors than the editor also contribute to how good a magazine is.) Your ideas are solicited—for purposes of discussion only. I'm not sure that any of us here at **THRUST** are ready to get involved in Worldcon politics to the degree that would be needed to change the Hugos... .

**Staffing Up - Second Call:** I'm still looking for additional editorial staff. Candidates must be willing to work hard for little money--looking for glory, not dollars. If you think you can help **THRUST** thrive, please contact me as soon as possible!

**Coming Soon:** Material already scheduled for future issues of **THRUST** includes a final column by John Shirley, an article by Janrae Frank on SF and fantasy from the feminist presses, an article on what may have been the final fan "interview" with Robert A. Heinlein, "Remembering Doc Smith" by Michael J. Patrich, another article by Ardath Mayhar, and interviews with Martin Cadigan, Thomas N. Scortia, Boris Vallejo, Forrest J. Ackerman, James Morrow, Janet Morris, and Lisa Goldstein. **THRUST** 33 is due out March 1, 1989. □

It Came From the Queen City: A Conversation With

# Mike Resnick



by A. J. Austin

Mike Resnick, although originally from Chicago, has now been a resident of the greater Cincinnati area for more than a decade. Mike and his wife Carol moved to Cincinnati in 1976, where they bought and still operate, a profitable dog kennel, a fulltime occupation that grew out of their collie-breeding hobby of several years earlier. (How profitable? Mike says that although he's very successful as a writer, the kennel outearns his writing by a margin of four to one.)

Included in his recent works are the popular *Tales of the Velvet Camel* series, and *Santiago*, which came in tenth in the 1986 LOCUS poll. *Stalking the Unicorn*, his recent Tor novel, is an adventure romp that successfully blends the fantasy genre with a hard-boiled private detective tale. His most recent release is *The Dark Lady*, a somewhat metaphysical examination of aliens and alienation.

**THRUST:** You've been writing for many years now. Do you still enjoy it as much as you used to?

**Resnick:** I like it much more. For the first fifteen years of my career I was a very prolific and anonymous hack. I specialized in churning out sex books, romance books, Gothic books -- all in four or five days apiece, all under pseudonyms -- and I didn't like it very much at all. It was just a

way to get rich. Now I write maybe two or three books a year at my own pace. I have the leisure, and pleasure, of re-writing and polishing my prose, and I enjoy it.

**THRUST:** I've heard that many writers started out by writing sex novels.

**Resnick:** A lot of writers in THIS field wrote them. There has always been a field in American literature where a fast, facile, anonymous writer could make a good buck. It happens that in the '60s, when I was starting out, it was the sex field. Right now it's the romance field. A number of SF writers worked in the sex field back then: Malzberg, Silverberg, Offutt, quite a few others. It was an easy way to make a quick \$1000 or \$1500 in three or four days, and back in the 1960s that was real money.

**THRUST:** Plus you sharpened up your writing skills.

**Resnick:** You write 200 books -- even 200 bad books -- and you learn how to push a noun up against a verb.

**THRUST:** Do you enjoy the leisure of doing only a few books per year, or do you sometimes miss the opportunity to churn them out one after the other?

**Resnick:** I look back at the old days and I don't know where I found the energy to churn them out at that rate. Nowadays, I enjoy the leisure of being thoughtful and careful. In fact, these days it's probably about two books a year. Since I became a "lead writer," as it were, publishers are asking for longer and longer books to justify the higher prices they stick on them. Since I moved to Tor, I'd say my average book's about 135,000 words; over at Signet, it was about 75,000. So it's almost an entire extra book each time I sit down to write a new one.

**THRUST:** What about the relationship between publisher and writer? Tor is well-known for the way they promote their writers. Is that one of the things you like best about them?

**Resnick:** I'm very happy with Tor. I know a number of publishers and I've worked for quite a few of them, but I can truthfully say that of them all, only Tom Doherty has become a personal friend -- as he is to most of his writers. It's a very unique relationship that exists at Tor, in that the entire company revolves around the publisher. Usually the publisher is a shadowy absentee who spends his time on a yacht in the Caribbean, clipping coupons. Tom gets in there and rolls up his sleeves and WORKS. I don't think

anyone in the industry knows distribution as well as he does.

Still, it's a business, and nobody understands that better than Tom and Beth Meacham. I hope Tor is the highest bidder on my next book -- as I say, I've been happy there and I'd like to continue our relationship -- but if not, I'm sure we'll part with no professional animosity and will remain personal friends.

**THRUST:** It seems that SF writers have a better relationship with their publishers than do writers in other genres. Would you agree?

**Resnick:** I would think so, simply because we get to meet our publishers and editors so often, at conventions and elsewhere. Also, in this field there are other publishers besides Tom Doherty who actively participate: Don Wollheim is one, Jim Baen's another, Jim Frenkel was one when he had Bluejay, and Judy-Lynn del Rey was very active, so I would say that this field has a far greater percentage of participatory publishers than most.

**THRUST:** You mention Judy-Lynn del Rey; of course, she passed away recently. If you look back at the past year or two, we have lost a lot of important names.

**Resnick:** We've lost a lot just this year: Terry Carr, James Tiptree, others.

**THRUST:** As we lose more of the founders in the field, and more younger writers start coming forward, are we seeing a "new age" in SF?

**Resnick:** No. What happened was that this was essentially a one-generation field. Many of the dinosaurs -- and the expression is not derogatory -- are still around: Clarke, de Camp, Williamson, Asimov. These are the guys who created the field. Once upon a time they were all that existed. Now you've got ten or twelve generations of writers, and as the first generation dies you're not going to see a cessation, because each generation is getting older. We have a number of writers in their sixties who are not considered founders of the field or "Campbell writers," as it were, and we're going to be losing them. One of the things that distresses me is when we lose a guy like Terry Carr who wasn't much older than me.

**THRUST:** The science fiction published over the past couple of years seems to be of fairly high quality. While the number of titles has certainly increased in the post-Star Wars era, has the quality gone up as well?

**Resnick:** I don't know if we are producing a higher percentage of truly outstanding works today than in 1957 or 1973, but I think that when you start looking at ten, and twenty, and thirty deep, our standard has improved. If nothing else, we've raised our level of mediocrity; in other words, the average midlist book or story is better than it was a generation ago.

**THRUST:** Let's discuss your writing style. In *Santiago*, you used a style similar in

many ways to the old space opera, introducing a new colorful character per chapter. Is this a writing style you personally enjoy?

**Resnick:** That's not necessarily the way I prefer to write; the story dictated the style. What I was trying to do in *Santiago* was simply to create a myth of the future; to borrow from the American frontier, the East African frontier, from tall tales I had heard. Each character, as he was introduced, was bigger than life; and as he played out his part I hope he became somewhat smaller, at least coming down to life-size and mildly believable.

I'm one of the people who considers "space opera" a pejorative. *Santiago* was a myth, and it used the stuff of myths, but it's been a long day, and if you want to call it a space opera, I'm too tired to argue.

**THRUST:** It's kind of like the old argument, "Is it SF or is it Sci-Fi?"

**Resnick:** I don't know. A couple of critics -- Tom Easton in *Analog* and a fellow named Rod Walker out on the West Coast -- have suggested from time to time that I don't really write science fiction anyway, that I write mainstream stories disguised as science fiction. I think it's probably true. Certainly my knowledge of science is minimal. I feel that I write morality plays, but bookstores allot very little rack space to morality plays and an enormous amount to science fiction, so I don't mind putting my morality plays on other worlds or future eras.

**THRUST:** You mentioned that you are now a "lead writer," and as such, the covers of your books reflect artwork by some of the best in the field: Michael Whelan, Boris, others. When you've completed a novel, and you first see the cover art, what goes through your mind?

**Resnick:** Usually "Gee, why didn't I think of that?" (I never guess right on which scene will make the cover.) Writers used to complain that they were asked by editors to suggest a good cover scene, and they would labor for hours coming up with what they thought was the best, and then they'd invariably find that the cover came from the first ten pages of the manuscript because the artist didn't feel like reading any farther and nobody else cared. These days I can't say that's the case with my stuff. I was very pleased with the Boris cover for *Stealing the Unicorn*, I was thrilled with Michael Whelan's cover for *Santiago*, and I was totally blown away by Whelan's cover for my hardcover, *Ivory*. (I've got Whelan again for *Paradise*, which will be out in hardcover early in 1989, and I can't wait to see what he comes up with.) McPheeeters, with whose work I'm unfamiliar, did a fabulous job on *The Dark Lady*. It's a concept I would never have considered, but now that I've seen it I'm convinced that it's the only possible way to tell what the book is about with a single illustration.

So I'm always thrilled to see somebody else's interpretation of my work. I feel the same way whenever I hear a folksong based on it, or see a costume based on it at a masquerade.

**THRUST:** What is *The Dark Lady* about?

**Resnick:** Well, the subtitle is "A Romance of the Far Future," and it's told in the first person by an alien, which I don't think has ever been done believably at book length before. I would like to think I've created a fully-fleshed, well-rounded alien narrator. And again, it's rather mythic; it's not quite science fiction and it's not quite fantasy. I suppose that if you were to coin a term for it, it would be "mystical SF."

**THRUST:** You've written both SF and fantasy though.

**Resnick:** I think the only pure fantasy I did was *Stalking the Unicorn*. I approach most of my stories as if they were science fiction. Admittedly, if you don't believe we can beat the speed of light, then just about everything I write is fantasy! (laughs)

**THRUST:** A lot of the critics of SF and fantasy don't really differentiate between the two.

**Resnick:** As a critic I can certainly differentiate, but as a writer it doesn't make much difference to me. I'll use whichever vehicle is better for telling a particular story. I feel that my job pretty much ends when I write "The End," at which point it is the publisher's job to find the best way to label and market it.

**THRUST:** There seems to be, in the past couple of years, a "sequel mania" in films, novels...

**Resnick:** Everywhere! (laughs)

**THRUST:** Do you feel a pressure to write sequels to some of your works? Will we see a sequel to *Santiago* or the further adventures of John Justin Mallory, or something like that?

**Resnick:** Well, never from Tor. In fact, one of the understandings I had with Tor when I moved there was that they would not ask for series or sequels.

**THRUST:** Do publishers usually demand sequels?

**Resnick:** Most publishers want them. You see, one of the things you have to understand is that the shelf life of the typical paperback is perhaps forty-five to sixty days. But if it's part of a series, it may stay out there on the stands as long as the series books continue to be issued at regular intervals. So from a publisher's point of view, he will do much better -- and financially, so will the writer -- with series books.

On the other hand, I object to series. I think they're written by lazy writers for lazier readers -- and I say this as a writer who has written two four-book series himself. I tricked myself into two ways of trying to write at a high level of creativity without recycling much material -- *Tales of the Galactic Midway* was really a 1,300-page novel broken into four parts, and the *Tales of the Velvet Comet* were set at 50-year intervals with no continuing characters -- but I don't know a third trick.

So I doubt I'll be writing any more series. Still (he waffled), there's always that pressure to make more money for yourself and your publisher.

**THRUST:** In some cases, sequels have been as well-received as -- or better than -- the originals; Orson Scott Card's *Speaker for the Dead*, for example. Is it possible to sequelize a novel, and build upon it to make the sequel "bigger and better" than the original?

**Resnick:** Well, Scott Card certainly did just that with *Speaker for the Dead* -- but I think it is very, very, rare and highly unlikely. A case frequently can be made when you find yourself really enjoying, say, *The Claw of the Conciliator* or *Second Foundation*, that it's actually just a part of one long work that was broken into individual books as a matter of convenience, because it is somewhat awkward to publish a two-thousand page volume. Very rarely do you see a book totally removed from a first book -- a separate, independent entity such as *Speaker for the Dead* -- that is better than the first book, because the nature of sequels and series is such that a writer is almost forced to recycle old material. And second-hand material is never, or very rarely, as good.

**THRUST:** Other writers like Larry Niven, will create one universe and set a number of totally different stories within that same universe. Is that considered a sequel? **Resnick:** Not by me, it isn't; I've done the same thing myself. I wrote a novel called *Birthright: The Boot of the Man for Signet* -- it was the first one I sold them, though not the first to see print -- which covered the history of the human race for the next seventeen or eighteen thousand years, until its extinction. My Signet editor, who at the time was Sheila Gilbert, asked me if I would be willing to put my other books into that future. I told her that as long as she didn't want me to make more than four or five passing references to certain commonalities, it didn't bother me in the least. I think eleven of my thirteen Signet books and four of my five Tor books have been set in that future. And if I were to chop a thousand words out of each book, you would never know it (except possibly with *Ivory*).

Evidently it seems to give some readers a warm feeling, but I don't know why. In a field that encompasses all time and all space, why people try to scrunch everything into one distinct future is beyond me. When I come to stories that don't fit into that future, like *The Branch or Stealing the Unicorn*, I don't put them there.

**THRUST:** What's the relationship between science fiction and current events like SDI, the Challenger accident, or Chernobyl? Is there a definite relationship of one to the other: does SF affect current events or vice versa?

**Resnick:** Current events affect science fiction much more than the other way around.

Science fiction has frequently been a literature of warning. When you're creating a future, it can only be one of two things: the kind of place you like, or the kind of place you don't like. No writer has more than one utopia within him, so most science fiction is necessarily dystopian. It follows certain trends and points out where those trends can go awry, and the fully realized stories of this type point out what we can do about it.

Personally, I have some doubts about whether that is the highest possible type of science fiction. Certainly a Campbellian or hard scientist would say that it is, but I happen to agree with a William Faulkner quote that is frequently used by Harlan Ellison, which says, in essence, that the highest form of writing is to chronicle the human heart in conflict with itself. Now, when this can be encompassed in a hard science story -- and it's been done recently by Bear, Benford, Brin, Gibson, and others -- so much the better. But when it can't, then I really feel to the degree with which the technology interferes with the human elements of story, to that degree the story's a failure.

**THRUST:** Science fiction has often outpaced the real world when it comes to technology, with certain things being "predicted" by SF writers coming true. Most SF writers are surprised when things they've written about come to pass. Is this the same for you?

**Resnick:** I don't think anything I've ever predicted has come true. I would be flabbergasted if it had. Certainly I never sat down with the notion that anything I wrote would come true, or that any single aspect of a societal background I'd created would come true.

For one thing, technology jumps way, way ahead of us. I just built a new house, and I had a guy come out to give me a security system. Well, he put in a normal system for a house, but we get to talking, and he told me about stuff he does for the Army for very hush-hush installations. They have as sensor that will identify your teeth, your palm print, your weight, and your bone structure, and match it against nine thousand people in its files, all in a second and a half. I have to tell you -- I didn't have that good a security system in the *Velvet Comet*, which was set fifteen hundred years from now! I was amazed. I don't think there's any way to keep up with it.

**THRUST:** Science fiction has always been a medium that has held a special fascination for the young...

**Resnick:** There's a very cynical statement to the effect that the Golden Age of Science Fiction is not 1939, but rather that the Golden Age of Science Fiction is "13."

**THRUST:** Is this, then, what makes science fiction so real for adults, because it was real for them when they were 13?

**Resnick:** Well, first off, you're presupposing that it's real for adults, and I don't know that it is.

**THRUST:** By "real" for adults, I mean that while you're reading it, it's a "real" story with "real" events and characters.

**Resnick:** I think over the last twenty years science fiction has come to be accepted by the public as a legitimate form of literature. And to that degree, it's probably as real as anything James Michener or Robert Ludlum writes. But it's still just storytelling. The only real things are not the events in the story, but the truths that the author wishes to impart. Facts are frequently the enemy of Truth, and when an author has something to say about the human condition, the way he sets it up in a book is not real; whether the points he wants to make are real depends upon the insight and skill of the individual author. I don't see any reason why science fiction can't do that as well as any other form of literature. I have a feeling that's not the answer you wanted, but it's the way I interpret the question.

**THRUST:** Many authors have said that when they are writing a book, they can't wait to get to the typewriter to find out what happens next. Do you ever feel this way?

**Resnick:** No. I've heard writers talk about how their characters have "lives of their own," but my characters do exactly what I want. I pull the strings, not them.

Carol and I -- Carol's my wife, my uncredited collaborator, and my primary editor -- she and I will sit down and discuss a notion that becomes a book for anywhere from a week to five years, as long as it takes. She will ordinarily come up with about half the plot and half the characters, and I won't sit down to write until I know almost every single thing that's going to happen in the book. When I sit down to write -- tonight, for example, I'll be working on a novel tentatively entitled *Orclee* -- I know exactly what's going to happen in Chapter 2, if not exactly HOW it's going to happen. I know the gist of what the people will say, and when I sit down at the computer I'll figure out how they'll say it.

I sit down to write four or five nights a week, usually from about ten in the evening until about four in the morning, and I'll usually come up with about ten to fifteen pages that I think are worth keeping. Carol gets up earlier than I do, and I'll leave the finished pages on the breakfast table for her. When I wake up, she has gone over them line-by-line, word-by-word, and has made copious notes, sometimes as long as the literature I've left for her itself. If the stuff she wants me to change is a relatively easy fix, I'll do it in the afternoon and then write something new that night. If it's not an easy fix -- and the first or second time through, it invariably is not -- then I'll wait until the evening and rewrite it based on her notes and my discussion with her.

I suppose I should add that I've never finished a book or short story that she totally approved of that didn't sell the first time out of the box. I have occasionally sent off manuscripts that she thought needed more work, and while they

eventually sell, it frequently takes more than one submission.

**THRUST:** It sounds like a perfect relationship.

**Rasnick:** I think it is. She has mastered what I think is the single most difficult thing, which is the ability to choose characters and stories that play to MY strengths rather than to harangue me to do the kinds of stories she would write were she at the computer. I have frequently begged her to allow me to list her as co-author, but since I do all the actual writing, she says she doesn't want to be listed. Also, she values her privacy. Anyway, there's no question in my mind that I would be a much poorer writer without her.

**THRUST:** We see a lot of established SF writers doing what they can to encourage and help new writers enter the field. Is this another thing that's special to SF and rarely found in other genres?

**Rasnick:** Over the years there have been attempts to spotlight new mystery or Western writers, but never to the extent that we publicize them in science fiction. I suspect it's partially because we're such a close-knit community and we really do care about the literature, and partially because we have suddenly expanded from a category that may have taken up five percent of the marketplace two decades ago to one that takes up more than 15% today. Thus, there is room to nurture these new talents without the established writers feeling threatened. Certainly, whatever anybody does tomorrow is not going to affect my place in the field, so I'm happy to help a new writer in any way that I can; he's not taking any bread out of my mouth.

**THRUST:** What do you tell people when they come up to you and say, "I want to be a science fiction writer?"

**Rasnick:** Probably the same very dull answer that every other writer gives 'em, which is that you don't talk about it, you sit down and DO it. There's no other way. It's as simple as that. You write. You send out what you write. You keep sending it out, and hopefully someone will buy it. (Of

course, if you get enough rejections on enough pieces, you may have to sit down and make an agonizing reappraisal of what you want to do for a living.) I don't know of any other way except to apply seat-of-the-pants to seat-of-the-chair and work. This doesn't mean that a bad writer can't make a good living; a lot of bad writers are doing just that. But they have good work habits and they produce copy conscientiously, though one hope that the cream eventually rises to the top.

**THRUST:** What writers, new or old, impress you?

**Rasnick:** Olaf Stapledon, Barry Malzberg, R.A. Lafferty, C.L. Moore, the work of Shickley and Bester prior to about 1970, and George Alec Effinger. In fact, I want to put in a special plug for Effinger's latest novel, *When Gravity Falls*. Nobody thinks of Effinger as a cyberpunk, and I'm sure he doesn't consider himself one, but the fact remains that this is far and away the best cyberpunk novel to come along, if only because he's made the prose more accessible and given us a protagonist we can root for. It's an excellent piece of work, the best thing he's done in a career of doing good stuff.

**THRUST:** I'm glad you brought up cyberpunk. It seems to be as controversial as anything has been over the years, with articles pro and con in many of the SF trade magazines. Can you define "cyberpunk" in twenty-five words or less?

**Rasnick:** In twenty-five words or less, I think I would have a very difficult time. Essentially, it is a literature of the near future with densely-laden prose offering up background and verisimilitude in every line. Most of the endings tend to be downbeat; most of the futures tend to be very high-tech; and most of the writing tends to show us the underbelly of society. That's probably closer to fifty words; sorry about that.

**THRUST:** That kind of illustrates some of the controversy right now. Many readers don't know what it is; and many who do don't know if they like it or not.

**Rasnick:** Well, this was the problem with the New Wave, too. If you will remember,

everyone "knew" that the New Wave was taking over science fiction -- but when you looked more closely, you couldn't find a single person except Mike Moorcock who admitted to writing it.

Cyberpunk has its own advocates and practitioners, but it does seem to be getting publicity totally out of line with its numbers. We have something like eight hundred people currently writing science fiction on a regular or semi-regular basis, and we have at most fifteen or twenty people writing cyberpunk. Most of them don't write novels either -- the effect it's had on the marketplace is absolutely minimal compared to the effect it's had in discussions among science fiction writers. It has some very loud and aggressive advocates.

The other interesting thing to me about cyberpunk is that I've never seen a literary movement, as such, where one man -- William Gibson -- was so far out ahead of the pack. When you ask, "Does cyberpunk sell?" they point to Gibson, because he sells very well indeed. "Does Hollywood take an interest in cyberpunk?" Well, yeah, they bought Gibson's *Neuromancer*. "Can cyberpunk win awards?" Well, yeah, Gibson won a Nebula and a Hugo. "Can cyberpunk get a big advance?" Yeah, well, Gibson gets six-digit advances. "Has cyberpunk produced a true work of art?" Yeah, well, Gibson's stuff measures up against the best the SF field has produced.

But when you get past Gibson, who is an authentic genius and would be a feather in the cap of any publishing house, it seems to be a movement that doesn't have much advocacy among editors. I'm not saying there's hostility; editors will buy it, but no one seems to be trying to push it very hard, the way Moorcock and Merrill pushed the New Wave.

There's nothing wrong with cyberpunk. It's a legitimate form of science fiction and has some very able practitioners: Walter Jon Williams, Pat Cadigan, Bruce Sterling, and a number of others. In fact, except for the downbeat endings and occasionally unattractive protagonists, I think it's exactly what John Campbell used to beg his writers to do: more and more and more thorough technical extrapolation and backgrounding.

But as a legitimate literary movement? Subtract Gibson from it and I don't think you'd even know it was there. □

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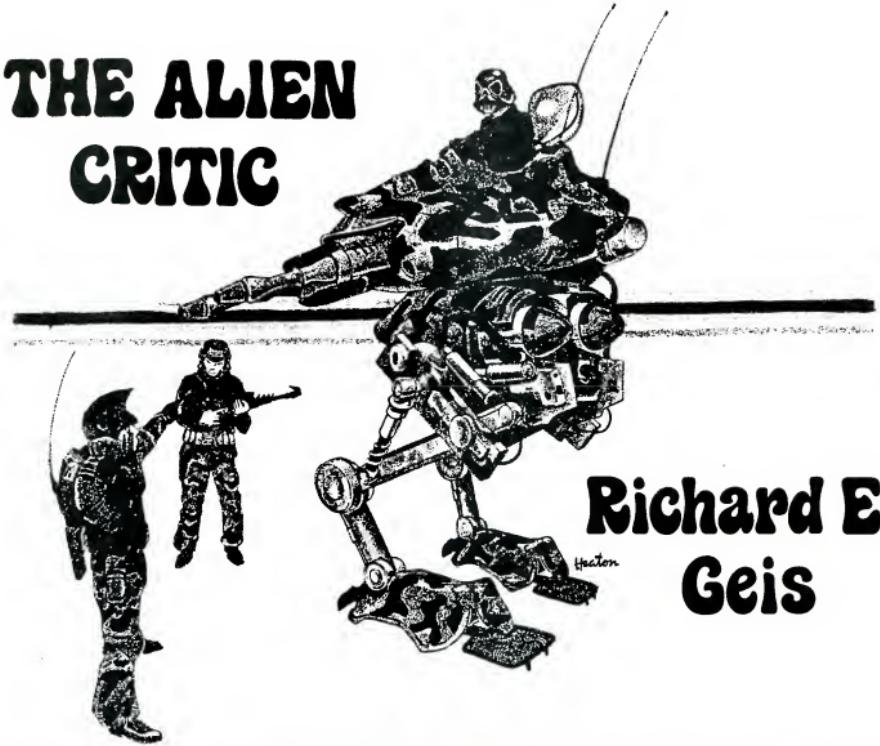
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# THE ALIEN CRITIC



## Richard E. Geis

"Heinlein is Dead . . . And Now It Can Be Said . . ."

Robert E. Heinlein was 80 years old when he died on May 8, 1988. He was a notable writer, a bad writer, and an interesting writer.

He called me on the phone one time when I was living in Santa Monica, and I made notes of the conversation afterward, to the best of my ability. And I promised that when he died that I would print those notes and the one long letter he sent me. At that time he didn't want the letter published in *The Alien Critic* THE ALIEN CRITIC because it would generate too much mail.

Well, he's beyond the pressures of mail, now, and I feel free of his proscription. Much of what he wrote is of interest to literary and bibliographic specialists, I think. So here it all is.

March 2, 1971:

Heinlein called.

Never reads reviews -- only harmful to writer.

He must be selective about public appearances -- too much bother otherwise; "nibbled to death" at conventions -- too emotionally exhausting.

Private unlisted phone, has to change it often.

Has social life but not with fans or those

concerned with his writing.

Likes to create "human beings" out of any specific race or from any specific place.

In creating Eunice, he placed two photos on the wall over his desk -- one of the most delicious blonde he could find -- the other the most lovely colored girl. But he made sure the race of Eunice (in *I Will Fear No Evil*) was not mentioned. Her actual physical description is implied, not specific.

Said letter from president of Putman's said good reviews and book is in third printing.

Hardcover *Evil* is bestseller in some cities.

In *Evil* he was deliberate and careful to let the reader supply the explanation for the multiple personalities in Eunice's body after the brain implantation. Objective approach (like ending of *2001*). Show but not explain. Three possible explanations:

1. Psychosis of an old man, mind unable to adjust -- call it a "healthy" psychosis -- allowed him to go on, to function.

2. Religious -- souls, etc., having to do something before final letting go.

3. Third is also religious -- but esoteric, not explained, referred to only.

Heinlein makes the reader work, makes the reader fill in.

Thinks *Starship Troopers* was philosophically "total freedom"...some thought it fascist. Robert Bloch -- good friend -- panned it.

He liked two of my books -- *The Sex Machine* and *The Endless Orgy*.

He thinks of *Stranger in a Strange Land* as *The Heretic* (this title). *Stranger* was Putman's title.

Clear, articulate, not senile in talk. Still ill. Not specific. I did not ask.

All this was confidential, not for the magazine.

I observed that *Evil* was not SF. He said he didn't think in categories but just tells a story. (Therefore *Evil* as a straight novel is one thing, as an SF novel it is another. As SF it is grotesque -- without the "rules" of SF it must be judged differently.)

And then I received the following letter, more than two and a half years later:

24 September 1973

Dear Mr. Geis:

Please find herewith my check for \$7.00 for two years of *The Alien Critic*.

And please! -- do not even mention in *The Alien Critic* that I have subscribed. This is a private communication, your eyes only, and I would MUCH prefer that no one see it

other than your staff of busy gnomes and that no one mention having seen it. No letter from me will ever be a L-O-F-C available for publication UNLESS SPECIFICALLY SO STATED IN THAT LETTER. Why? Because I already am flooded with more mail than I can handle -- 54 pieces demanding attention at once . . even though Mrs. Heinlein handles most of the reader mail with an (unavoidable) checkoff list of standard answers to standard questions. And this pressure of work and mail is why the check enclosed is dated 17 days earlier than this letter -- endless sudden pressures.

I tried to phone you, using Portland directory service. Have you discovered, as I have, that a listed telephone makes it impossible to get any writing done? I dislike not having my phone listed but it is the lesser of two evils.

I don't subscribe to "fanzines," rarely read them when someone sends me one. But your publication is not a "fanzine" in my opinion, but a very useful one to me. I find myself cross-referencing all sorts of items in it for my permanent files. I enjoyed your review of my latest book in #6 Aug. 73. Your comments are sensible, and your opinions are stated as OPINIONS, not as facts. I have just one mild beef: I prefer reviewers not to give away the exact ending of a book, no matter how much they synopsize it otherwise.

Now for some comments that are NOT beefs: Your page 8, 2nd para. -- No, I do not think we will make that much progress in such matters in ca. 2000 yrs -- given the frame of that book, Earth degenerated, human race widely scattered on many planets all but a few thinly settled; I think the race will be too busy wrestling with the problems of new frontiers, etc., to have time for the most difficult subject of all -- time enough to get very far with them.

P 9 I WILL FEAR NO EVIL. Solipsism is one possible theory for that novel, yes -- but I left at least four theories open -- while in fact I structured it as (Top Secret!) a person in an intolerable situation who manages to cope with it through a psychotic adjustment, i.e., there ain't no ghosts in that book at all -- just an old, old man temporarily in a young body, who hears "voices" in his head that permit him to be happy right up to the moment when he dies dead, dead, dead. Had it not been that I darn near died just as dead while I was giving that MS its final cutting and editing, I would have cut out at least 30,000 words, clarified it a little and planted a few more clues -- but not many more and subtle ones. But read it again someday (that happy day in the far, far future when you have time) and see if you can find ONE WORD of verifiable fact in anything those "voices" say that old Johann either did not already know (e.g., the Yoga text he had owned for years but it had "slipped his mind" that he owned it) -- or "facts" never verified which allowed him to fantasize adequate answers to things that puzzled him. (By the way, did you spot that our lovely heroine is a Negro girl? -- the clues are all there, carefully buried but in print.)

But the book never did get its final polish and cutting, so it is, I think, one of my poorest in technique. I was unconscious much of three months, was expected to die -- and expected it myself, whenever I came up to the surface -- so I urged Mrs. Heinlein to sign the contract and let it be published as it stood, as I was certain that if anyone else cut it, he would cut out all the necessary clues to the reader as "surplusage." The fanzines (so you told me at the time it was published; I never saw any of them) uniformly roasted it. But the professional reviews were much more favorable, most of them, and the book has had a huge sale both in hb & pb and is still selling strongly in both and was for the last two years listed as a pb "bestseller" in NY trade journals -- if the trend curve on sales holds up, I expect it to pass my STRANGERINGSL in sales -- already has in cash return to me. So I don't give a damn what the fanzines say about it -- once I started aiming at a wider audience, the fanzine reviewers started panning me & the large-circulation reviewers started noticing my work. (The NYTimes panned STRANGER -- instead of ignoring it -- the very week I first cracked LIFE with a review, favorable. But on this latest one the NYTimes reviewed it TWICE, different reviews about a month apart, each different, each strongly favorable. It has had the best reviews and the most reviews of any book I've ever had (again, excepting fanzines, but I simply can't afford to pay any attention to fanzine reviews) -- and the darn thing earned back its nut for the publisher in only three weeks from publication date -- I don't dare guess how much money it will make me in the long run. (Oh, shut up, Robert!)

Yes, I've toyed with solipsism in several stories, not from a belief in it but because it is a universal idea that lends itself to story. There are so few basic themes that can be used to ring a bell to almost anyone -- the meaning of life and the universe, sex, money, birth, death, politics, war, the nature of time & space -- and I've played with all of these and will again. Gadgets and adventure are merely tools, stage dressing. But the above list are gut subjects. But I haven't used a solipsist story theory as often as you seem to think. Have you read my very old short-story THEY? JWCjr thought it was about paranoia; many readers have thought it was solipsist -- but try reading it for exactly what the words say, straight realism -- it may surprise you if you have never done so. Accept (while reading) the basic statement that the central character really IS the center of a conspiracy and the victim of it.

No, I don't have, I think, any unusual fear of death; I have faced death close up too

many times in the course of a fairly long life, and made my peace with the matter some forty years ago, the first time I found myself in "death row." I've spent too much of my life with guns and planes and hurricanes and such not to have grown somewhat relaxed about it -- and typhoid fever and two bouts with amebic dysentery plus some five other sorts of tropical dysentaries and pneumonia and the Spanish flu in the WWII epidemic and tuberculosis and one type of cancer and a few others, including thirteen surgical operations -- no, fourteen; one slipped my mind. But I've had one hell of a good time and seen most of this globe and have driven a car for more than fifty years with a perfect safety record and I have no complaints, Sergeant, no complaints -- I've been luckier than I had any right to expect. Today I have all my affairs in such order that I could die in the night tonight with no worries -- save that my wife and I would rather die together in a plane crash or such.

Speaking of tonight, it is past my bedtime

... as I worked till 6:30 a.m. the night before -- writing this letter is sheer luxury, stolen time, as I promised Mrs. Heinlein that I would sack in early for once. (Slight quake just then -- no sweat, I designed this house myself and made it both earthquake & fire proof -- as we are far out in the mountains and near the San Andreas Fault.

Poul's Beer Mutterings are worth the subscription price; I hope you can keep me. Have you considered really long-term subs, or even lifetime subs? I note you discount by 12.5% simply on a 2-year sub -- care to figure up a lifetime subscription for me? I am 66+; the actuarial tables give me a life expectancy of 13.2 years but you might hit the jackpot the day after I pay it. No hurry about it -- but I do like to make dues and subs and such as long-term as possible. It's a nuisance to have to renew some fiddlin' item every week or so.

By the way, p 10 and 71 are blank in the complimentary copy you sent to me -- got any left that are not blank?

All good luck to THE ALIEN CRITIC and a long and happy life to it and its editor-publisher.

Yours, Robert A. Heinlein

I had thought that Heinlein himself was unconsciously solipsist, and perhaps even senile in the sense that old brains often are affected by hardening of their arteries and often beliefs and attitudes become more extreme and paranoid without the self becoming aware of it. (Not me! I've got soft arteries, and I'm not that old!) Heinlein was 65 when he wrote this letter.

It's interesting and revealing that for a man who professes not to care about reviews, Heinlein actually was concerned and cared what reviewers thought of his books, especially reviews by writers he liked and/or respected. I sense a kind of insecurity in him, as if he knew his work wasn't all that great and that his money wasn't properly earned.

I don't think Heinlein was a very good writer as far as technique and style go. He knew the basics of storytelling and he had several self-based characters down pat, but once he achieved financial success with Stranger, he became shamefully self-indulgent and "senile" in allowing his predilection to talkiness to get out of control and in letting his choices of theme and storyline spring from secondchildhood interest, sex and its intellectual-SF possibilities.

But these remarks are probably unfair, since I didn't read his last few books and will not reread the earlier ones.

Robert A. Heinlein is dead and his SF juveniles will probably live forever. □

It's the year of the Recycled Image -- again. Most of the major SF/fantasy films of 1988, such as there have been, seem to be assembled out of prefabricated parts. This is hardly surprising. Hollywood has always been eager to repeat what works, until suddenly it doesn't. Remakes and hasty sequels are hardly a purely modern phenomenon.

A good example turned up on local television recently, the classic King Kong double-feature with its seldom-seen sequel Son of Kong, which was thrown together in less than a year in order to cash in on the Big Ape.

The first half hour or so of the sequel is fun. A thought popped into my head as I watched the climax of the first movie: *If this were taking place in 1988, boy would King's promoter get sued!* Well, apparently they thought of that in 1933 too, because our hapless hero spends the first twenty minutes or so of the sequel dodging summonses, and when he finally gets one for some lady's mental anguish and sprained ankle, he escapes his apartment on a rag-picker's wagon with a bucket over his head and sails for the South Seas -- whereupon audience expectations and a lack of imagination on the part of everyone else doom Son of Kong to the status of half-baked parody, delivering the same as before only less of it, very much second-hand goods. (There's even a ludicrous scene of a Chinese coolie battling a triceratops with a meat cleaver.) That, of course, is why the sequel is so seldom seen. And as for the REMAKE, well, the less said the better.

But sometimes recycled images can be handled with intelligence and style, and what might have been a rip-off becomes true homage.

Surely one of the greatest homages in a long time is Who Framed Roger Rabbit a film "presented" by Touchstone Pictures and Steven Spielberg, directed by Robert Zemeckis, starring Bob Hoskins, Christopher Lloyd, Joanna Cassidy, Stubby Kaye, and a lot of animated "toons" (which are fully as distinct characters as the human actors); adapted from the novel Who Censored Roger Rabbit? by Gary K. Wolf (St. Martin's Press, 1981; Ballantine, 1982). For all those viewers who loved or just grew up with the classic Disney and Warner Brothers cartoons, this is an amazing mixture of nostalgia and in-jokes. For younger audiences, it's still great fun, and, in a weird way, science-fictional.

Imagine an alternate Hollywood of the 1940s in which the cartoon characters are contract players, who live in an animated ghetto known as Toon Town. The 'toons are very much creatures in their own right, with their own drives and obsessions quite apart from those of humans. Roger Rabbit, for example, can't help being funny, even when it's likely to get him killed. And when a human is murdered, apparently by a 'toon, it's done in classic 'toon fashion, with an enormous safe dropped on the victim from high up. Enter an embittered human detective (Hoskins), who plays a down-and-out Sam Spade type utterly straight -- for wonderful contrast with the 'toons and the sheer absurdity of the premise. He's embittered because a 'toon killed his brother (with a piano), but gets

caught up in the case and ultimately convinced that Roger (who has been accused of the safe dropping) is innocent. Behind all this is an utterly crazed, sinister plan to destroy Hollywood's superb trolley lines and build something called the Los Angeles Freeway, incidentally razing Toon Town in the process.

Great stuff, and almost perfect technically. The live/animated interaction is the best yet achieved on film. 'Toons manipulate real objects freely as in a scene in which a 'toon throws a stack of (real) dishes, one by one, and another in which Roger is handcuffed to Hoskins, who must hide him underwater in a sink while animated bad guys ransack his (the detective's) apartment. The real tour de force comes when the detective must go into Toon Town itself (carrying a 'toon gun, with talking bullets), and suddenly we have a live actor in an animated background rather than animated characters in a live background.

There are some shots which seem a little out of focus, particularly if you're sitting close to the screen. I think it's a depth of focus problem. The movie is filled with subtle sight gags, to the extent you're always trying to look into the background for cartoon cameos. (Did you see the Seven Dwarfs coming out of a subway? I didn't, but other people with me reported them.) In any movie you're expected to look where the camera is focused. But in this one, you're like an inquisitive kid at a magician's act, deliberately looking elsewhere.

There are so many hidden little details that this is going to be a great repeat-movie. Ultimately it'll become a favorite for the VCR, so you can freeze a frame and see if that really was the Seven Dwarfs. Or, how many famous props can you spot in the Acme warehouse? (You know, Acme, the company that provided Duck Dodger's disintegrating gun, and the various gadgets used by Willy Coyote in the Road Runner cartoons.)

As a story the film is quite adequate, fast-moving and -- almost -- logical. The only major . . . er . . . rabbit out of a hat comes at the end when the hero suddenly starts doing 'toon tricks himself, jumping up to the ceiling, bouncing, etc. Now it was established that 'toon physics apply to humans INSIDE TOON TOWN in the scene in which Hoskins is squashed into an amoeboid pancake by a rapidly rising elevator, but the climax takes place in the Acme warehouse, merely adjoining Toon Town. It seems an inconsistency, unless you hypothesize that 'toon radiation extends a bit beyond the actual boundaries of Toon Town.

The plot is of course standard '40s trenchcoat stuff. (Look for the black bird. Just look.) That is the whole point. By mixing so many standard images, Who Framed Roger Rabbit becomes both a re-creation of and a tribute to the Hollywood of yesteryear.

Great stuff. And of course we know that a scheme as maniacal as destroying the L.A. transit system in favor of a freeway could only occur in a fantasy film . . . right?

Willow (George Lucas producer, Ron Howard director, starring Warwick Davis, Jean Marsh, Val Kilmer, Joanne Whalley; production art by Moebius) is not nearly as

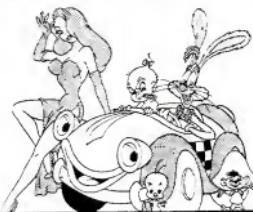
# WORDS & PICTURES

## movie reviews

by Darrell Schweitzer

# Who framed ROGER RABBIT

A ROBERT ZEMECKIS FILM





interesting, alas. Where *Roger Rabbit* took a mass of familiar images and turned them into an affectionate parody, *Willow* merely plays them straight, pretending that something creative is going on.

Well it isn't. Think of the story this way: Middle Earth is menaced by the Forces of Evil, so Frodo teams up with Han Solo to fight Darth Vader (a heavy in an ugly mask, nothing more) and the Witch Queen from *Snow White*. The good guys win, of course. Once more, a cub scout and a street hustler defeat Hitler...

And that's all there is to it. There's no attempt to look at the meaning of all this. It is a straightforward story, competently told in cinematic terms, but hardly surprising. The effects are, as you'd expect in a big-budget fantasy flick, quite good, but the action is never quite believable, especially when the handful of good guys (effectively one warrior, and Frodo) defend a castle against a whole army. There's a fine monster at this point, but it's just one more obstacle for the Han-Solo character to overcome, and it contributes nothing to the plot. The bad guys, human, subhuman, and supernatural, all seem to have learned hand-to-hand combat in the same training school that taught the Imperial Storm-troopers of *Star Wars* how to shoot. The final confrontation between the Good Witch and the Bad Witch begins well enough as a magical duel, but ends, embarrassingly, as an old-fashioned catfight, complete with hair-pulling.

Only children are likely to be thrilled. The rest of us will find it merely pretty -- and an exercise in what might have been. Do you realize that if they'd thrown away this silly script, the folks who made this movie had within their grasp the capacity to film *The Lord of the Rings*? We will avoid any discussion of the Ralph Bakshi abortion and the even worse made-for-TV return of the King. It hasn't been done. But it could be. In *Willow* there's a whole community of believable hobbits (dwarfs and midgets), the right "mock-medieval look," sorcery, spectacle, castles, monsters -- it's all there.

The remake of *The Blob* is actually more interesting. This one is getting panned by the newspapers, but you should see it. It's definitely fun, and at times surprisingly suspenseful. And you should see it as I did,

in close proximity to the original Steve McQueen film. The comparison is interesting.

The whole point of a remake like this is to take some favorite (usually) '50s SF/horror film and do a super version, using modern special effects technology and hopefully patching up any stupidities in the script in the meantime. (The remade *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, for example, is much more logical, and has the more convincing ending which was considered too downbeat for a '50s audience.)

So Tri Star Pictures and Chuck Russell (director, and co-author of the screenplay, with Frank Darabont) have redone the Steve McQueen "classic."

The problem is that the original isn't much of a classic. I think it's remembered mostly as McQueen's first film. Otherwise, it is a standard '50s cheapie, with a critter that looks variously like a rolling garbage bag, a wad of chewing gum, and chocolate yogurt. There is only a trace of an allegedly significant subtext about youth versus authority, far less than people seem to remember. The original *Blob* is hardly the monster-movie equivalent of *The Wild One*. McQueen's character was a slightly naughty highschooler whose biggest offense might be just a touch of reckless driving -- practically a preppie by today's standards, and hardly daring in 1958.

Interestingly, the remake turns this subtext into the major thrust of the film, as if Russell tried to remake the film people sort of remember rather than the one that actually turns up on late-night reruns.

The McQueen role is played by Kevin Dillon (Matt's younger brother apparently), only his character has become the town hood, a misfit with long hair, an earring, a fondness for motorcycles, and a worsening relationship with the local police. (But he's not a bad kid after all. Needless to say he is not regarded as a reliable witness when blobbery things start happening.)

The most notable change in the script is that the *Blob* is no longer merely a nameless cosmic spitball; it is a U.S. government bio-warfare project gone wrong. So the authority figures really ARE the bad guys. (And as a sign that racial equality really HAS arrived in Hollywood, the chief evil government scientist -- who gets killed the way chief evil government scientists always do -- is played by a black actor, who could have been replaced by a white actor without making a bit of difference.)

Lots of the scenes are the same as in the original, only staged better, and, whenever possible, more gorily. (Remember the old guy with the blob on his hand? Well, there's an old guy in this one too, and his demise is worthy of John Carpenter's *The Thing*.) Then there are lots of borrowings, from *E.T.*, *Allens*, the aforementioned Carpenter *The Thing*, and more.

Up pops the subtext once again: you'll recall that in the original there is a movie-theater scene, and the kids are watching what looks uncomfortably like *Pien Nine from Outer Space*. In the remake, two teenaged characters have snuck off to see what is clearly one of the Friday the 13th films, complete with ski-masked killer. There's a Real Asshole in the back seat (who gets killed the way

Real Assholes always do, once the blob arrives through the projection booth) who blathers on about "this one is gonna get killed" and "this one is gonna get away." This in-joke tries to become a kind of metafictional (metafilmic?) critique of horror films, what one of the kids called "standard slice and dice." In one sense, it is the cleverest updating of the old film. In another, faster than you can say Pot-calling-the-kettle-black, there are (or have been) a whole series of fuck-and-you-get-killed scenes.

But before this can become too predictable or pretentious, Russell's *The Blob* turns into an action film, and generates more real suspense than you would have thought possible. That is, some.

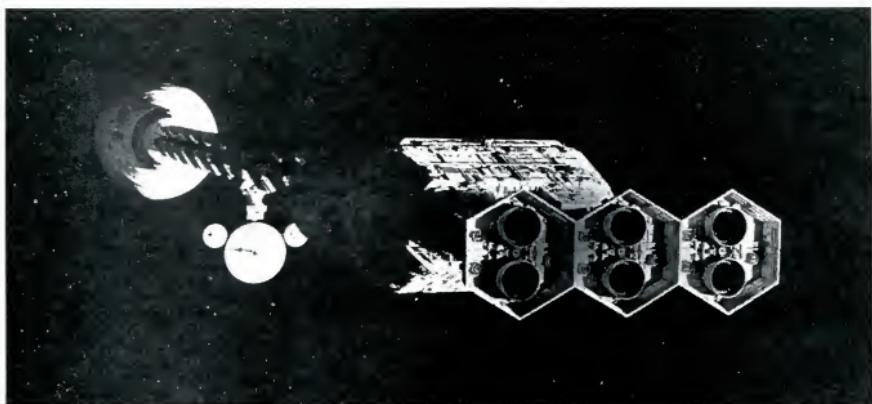
Anybody see the re-edited *Dune* on TV? If not, you didn't miss much. David Lynch didn't like it, so he took his name off and inserted his Cordwainer Bird pseudonym. And, not having the original available to me as I write this, I can't check, but I was fascinated to note the screenplay attributed to one "Judas Booth." Another oh-so-subtle hint that the film's integrity has been betrayed and assassinated, or was somebody actually saddled with such an unlikely name?

The main difference is the ten-minute long, very crude "history" of the universe up to the time of the action. This is done with artwork -- not animation, just artwork -- that looks like production sketches rather than finished drawing. (You know, a rough sketch to show what a scene is going to look like.) This, with the occasional bits of added footage one can spot -- there is also some subtracted footage, the pulled heartplug scene, for instance -- merely underlines what is wrong with this movie in the first place.

Lynch was afraid that his audience consisted of idiots. Therefore he explained, and explained, and explained, for all the background isn't that much more complicated than *Star Wars*. *Dune* contains enough prefabricated material that all but the dimmest are going to be able to follow the basic story.

If you look closely, you'll see that few cast members ever get a chance to act. They spend much of their time staring at the camera while a voice-over is dubbed in, explaining what the character is thinking. Remember the scene in which Lady Jessica comes in to find that Paul has survived the ordeal of the box-of-pain? Does she rush in, her face showing anxiety, then relief? Nope. She stares blankly while the voice-over says "MY SON IS ALIVE," something the audience already knows. A competently directed film would have shown this in the process of telling the larger story, rather than interrupting to carefully explain what everyone's emotional state is. It's an old rule of storytelling, which you'd think the movie folks would appreciate most of all: show, don't tell. But Lynch told, again and again and again. So none of his characters came alive. The audience couldn't care. The film was a monumental flop. And the re-edited version may have patched up a little bit of the logic, but it contains even more deadening explanation, which is hardly an improvement.

# 2001 Plus 20



## GREGORY BENFORD

How do we remember it now? Beclouded by reality, yet hanging above that scratchy truth.

The plot fades into the background, and the luminous techno-background looms. I recently helped gather the afternotes for the Voyager Company's video disc collector's edition of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, contributed an article on its science, and narrated a segment comparing cuts from the film with NASA footage. I came away with a strong sense of how quietly powerful science fiction can be.

The glida of winged shuttles in orbit, Kubrick's opening arabesque, reflects a momentum of design which was already present when the film was made. Still, innumerable scenes did foretell NASA's later real-life images. 2001 undoubtedly influenced both designers and astronauts, shaping the way we thought of our artifacts. The film even led to astronauts making jokes from orbit about glimpsed monoliths.

Many echoes of the film in the space program arise from the intricate scientific understanding that underlies every frame. The loping, fluid low-G walk came out of detailed calculation of how our gait depends on the restoring force of gravity. The acrobatic grace of zero-G motion sometimes looks like underwater ballet, and in the famous scene of returning

without a helmet through the airlock, that was the way Kubrick shot it. These meticulously realized scenes came from detailed study of how the human machine would work in environments no one had yet seen.

Gravity imposes flat floors, straight walls, rectangular rigidities--the linear province inhabited by virtually all films until this one. Weightlessness allows the ample symmetries of the cylinder and sphere. NASA's Lunar Excursion Module is nearly spherical, like Kubrick's, because that is the figure which yields the greatest volume for a fixed surface area.

Part of the film's magic comes from the expressive freedom of effortless new geometries, conveying a kinesthetic sensation of fresh dimensions in human possibility. Spinning a cylinder produces a fake centrifugal gravity, as Kubrick and Clarke knew well. NASA and the Soviets now routinely use this effect to exercise astronauts. The effect is not large in such stations as Skylab, and it can give you disorienting sensations, but it did prove useful.

But humans aren't the answer to every task. The knotty complication of landing a craft is the natural business of computers, not our blunt human reflexes. Machines are far better at guiding the artful swoop

among worlds.

Kubrick's pervasive gadgets resemble our present and foretell a future because he and his coworkers sensed the inevitable convergence of technology, necessarily dictating form. In the 1960s we knew how better spacesuits should look, though we hadn't mastered all the details of making them. Similarly, we understood that the living quarters of a probe to Jupiter had to be isolated from the nuclear power plant by a long connecting shaft. Twenty years later, NASA still hasn't even designed such a craft, but the look of the spaceship in the film strikes us as right. Someday it may actually exist.

When the film first appeared, amidst the heyday of space exploration, many thought we had a fair shot at a permanent moon base by that mythic date, 33 years in the future. Despite Kubrick's ironies and satirical flourishes, his frontier of orbital Hiltons and Pan Am, this was an optimistic film.

The beautiful aspects of life deep in Earth's gravity well--the artful lift of birds' wings, say, and the curl of an ocean wave--are missing in space. Kubrick saw that rigorous prognostication could glimpse the new beauties of that environment. He reminds us that we should be careful in our dreams, for they shall shape our realities. □

**The Day of Creation** by J.G. Ballard  
(Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1988, 254 pp., \$17.95)

Reviewed by Michael Bishop

Late in this rich, imagistic novel about the origin of a brand new river in Central Africa and the feverish obsessions of the man who thinks he has unleashed it, the narrator, an expatriate British doctor named Mallory, states his predicament: "A posse of armed gendarmes was after my blood, I was infatuated with a teenage girl, and almost everyone I had recruited to my bizarre cause was either dead or dying."

Extracted from the visionary flow of J.G. Ballard's first novel since the international best-seller *Empire of the Sun* (upon which Steven Spielberg based an incongruously pretty movie), this summary appears to synopsize a fast-paced, melodramatic summer beach book with a devil-may-care Ian Fleming hero, a nubile femme fatale, and a plot as convoluted as a chart of the fund diversions in the Iran-Contra fiasco.

But Dr. Mallory's pulp-fiction lament may be one of his most uncharacteristic utterances, and Ballard's new novel is not really a cross between a CIA counter-insurgency manual and a Robert Ludlum thriller. In fact, it more nearly resembles *Green Mansions* as told by a medium-cool late 1980s cynic. Nonetheless, Mallory manages to fall in love--with both his upstart river and a mysterious African girl named Noon, who leads him to the river's source only to vanish heartbreakingly from the headwaters of his imagination.

The plot of *The Day of Creation* is a simple one. Working for the World Health Organization in a drought-stricken Saharan nation, the shabby Doctor Mallory takes over a drilling project headed by a Belgian engineer wounded in a guerrilla attack on Port-la-Nouvelle. A tractor under Mallory's supervision uproots a dead oak, causing a steady outflow from the aquifer beneath the desert. Within days, released by this accident from its northern source, a mighty river sweeps down. Sanger, a documentary film-maker with bad teeth and a sleazy reputation, registers this river--under the doctor's name--with the National Geographic Society. At once prudified and peeved, Mallory then seeks to destroy his namesake.

"All this water has ruined my irrigation project," he tells the widow of a Rhodesian veterinary in Port-la-Nouvelle.

Unable to "scotch" the river, Mallory sets out in a car-ferry called the Salambo to discover its source. With him goes Sanger, Sanger's Indian assistant, Mr. Pal, and an enigmatic 12-year-old African girl who at first appears to regard Mallory with contempt but who later seems to be the only person to realize that Mallory and the river "are one." This journey upriver is complicated by the helicopter pursuit of Captain Kagwa, whose precious Mercedes is tied to the ferry's deck, and by the presence of guerrillas hostile to both the Salambo and the pursuing gendarmes.

In a recent interview with James Vernier, Ballard has said that *The Day of Creation* may be read as a "realistic novel," apparently because it has a present-day setting and makes use of technological metaphors based on such familiar

# REVIEWS

## BOOKS, ETC.

activities as TV broadcasting and high-tech warfare rather than on such quasi-futuristic endeavors as space colonization and genetic tinkering.

Ballard, then, is at some pains to distinguish this book not only from his SF disaster novels of the early 1960s (*The Wind from Nowhere*, *The Drowned World*, *The Drought*) but also from his gritty, almost fetishistic urban-disaster novels of the 1970s (*Crash*, *Concrete Island*, *High Rise*). Understandably, he wishes to place this new book in the company of his most accessible novel to date, *Empire of the Sun*, the harrowing semi-autobiographical World War II adventure story that seized Spielberg's eye and transformed a loyal cult following into a broad-based audience.

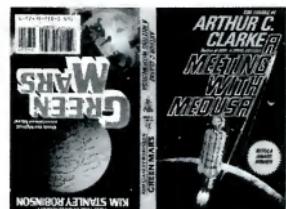
However, if *The Day of Creation* is a realistic novel, then it is a thoroughly Ballardian "realistic novel." Every character and event appears to carry an allegorical, a symbolic, or at least a poetic freight that few self-acknowledged realists try to smuggle aboard their narratives. Many readers will feel obligated to try to decode the novel. Even though it is probably best to approach *The Day of Creation* as Ballard himself recommends—that is, as an "imaginative novel" that "can be read as a realistic novel"—the temptation to look for correspondences between its literal elements and a suspected metaphorical subtext is a powerful one. Moreover, this temptation seems justified both by the outlandishness of many of the novel's surface events and the hallucinatory cargo of its image-generating prose.

"Fed by all this moisture," rhapsodizes Ballard at one point, "a heavy mist lay between us and the sun, and at midday this miasma turned into an amber haze, so that we seemed to be forever drifting within the mirage of a golden sea."

What does *The Day of Creation* signify? What is the crux of its elusive allegory? Mallory's obsessiveness strikes me sometimes as defiantly Abhian, as if this were a novel about man's place in an indifferent universe, but at others as that of a deliberate artist like Ballard himself, as if this were a novel about the redemptive power of the creative act. Noon, for example, like the muse of any committed artist, alternates maddeningly among her various roles as temptress, tormentor, and confidante. Meanwhile, the River Mallory functions convincingly both as a metaphor for the writer's entire body of work and as a trope for those unpredictable blockages

and outpourings that typify almost any artist's efforts to do the work and to do well.

But forget all that. *The Day of Creation* operates, as Ballard claims it does, on the straightforward level of literal narrative: and if the reader goes away from the book believing that the author has couched something more—something provocatively transcendent—in his vivid, shimmering text, well, that's a plus, a bonus that we can save or spend however our personal reservoirs of insightfulness permit. *The Day of Creation* is a lovely piece of prose in search of patient, collaborative-minded readers.



**A Meeting With Medusa** by Arthur C. Clarke / *Green Mars* by Kim Stanley Robinson (Tor Books, 1988, \$2.95, ISBN 812-53362-3)

**Hardfought** by Greg Bear / *Cascade Point* by Timothy Zahn (Tor Books, 1988, 179 pp., \$2.95, ISBN 812-55971-1)

**Born With The Dead** by Robert Silverberg / *The Selkie Tree* by Brian W. Aldiss (Tor Books, 1988, 183 pp., \$2.95, ISBN 812-55982-5)

Reviewed by Doug Frazt

Over the past few decades in the field, science fiction of novella (short novel) length has included some of the best, but often least accessible, works generated in the field. Each year, it seems that a handful of brilliant works at this length are added to the genre—an impressive number considering that so few are written each year. So Tor's decision to create a new "doubles" line—patterned after the Ace Doubles of the '50s and '60s, but using reprints instead of new SF novellas—is a good idea whose time has surely come.

The first Tor Double teams one of the most heralded novellas of the '70s, Arthur Clarke's "A Meeting With Medusa," 1972 Hugo Award nominee and Nebula Award winner, with an only slightly less heralded novella of the '80s, Kim Stanley Robinson's "Green Mars," a 1986 Hugo nominee. It is a clever pairing; Tor's editors obviously are hoping that fans of Clarke's humanistic sense-of-wonder SF will also find Robinson's similar, younger viewpoint to their liking.

Tor Double No. 2 brings together two award winners from 1983: Greg Bear's "Hardfought," winner of the Nebula, and Timothy Zahn's "Cascade Point," which (somewhat unexpectedly) beat it out for the Hugo. Bear's novella remains one of the best hard SF works of the '80s, and is the story (along with "Blood Music") that established Bear as a major new star on the hard SF scene. Zahn's story is

Analog-brand problem-solving SF with a decided '60s feel, and is subject to some of the more annoying shortcomings of this style of SF, most notably the inclusion of forced, illogical situations needed to make the plot work. In "Cascade Points," the problem needing solving is created by a small interstellar ship taking on a paying passenger who brings with him, in a medical device, some "Ming Metal," which is well known to play havoc with the interstellar jumps such as spaceship takes through the "cascade points" of the title. In 200 years of interstellar commerce using cascade-point technology, no one has thought to routinely run all passenger luggage through their handy Ming-Metal detectors before taking off.

For Double No. 3 reaches further back in SF literary history to join two Nebula winners, Brian Aldiss's "The Saliva Tree," the classic 1968 story of alien invasion set at the turn of the century and told in a style unabashedly borrowed from H. G. Wells, and Robert Silverberg's 1974 introspective classic, "Born With The Dead."

The amazing wealth of good SF novellas in SF's past, as well as the new works being added every year, should assure that this series can continue to feature top class work for years to come. The Tor Doubles series is clearly worthy of your perusal and support.



**Outpassage** by Janet & Chris Morris  
(Pageant Books, 1988, 384 pp., \$3.50,  
ISBN 0-517-00832-7)

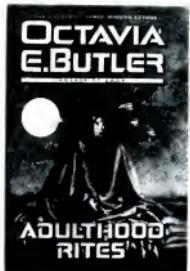
Reviewed by Eugene Lin

Janet and Chris Morris of *Heroes in Hell* fame have written an atypical work of militaristic SF that falls left-of-center on the standard Haldeman to Heinlein scale. *Outpassage* is a "message" novel showing how first world capitalists oppress third world laborers. It also features an alienated soldier fighting in off-planet impersonal conflicts and experiencing relativistic time effects during the necessary interstellar travel. In this respect, it is more than ideologically

similar to *The Forever War*.

The aforementioned soldier is Sgt. "Det" Cox; his viewpoint alternates with that of the other main character: Paige Barnett, a high-level employee of InterSpace Tasking Corporation, a ruthless American mega-corporation which functions as the standard corporate villain. Cox is sent to an IST mining colony to put down a revolution of third-worlders who have shipped off-planet to work. Apparently, the workers have been forming a religion around sightings of aliens who can resurrect the dead. Barnett is one of these workers, shanghaied into service after discovering some IST secrets. As one might expect, Barnett and Cox become involved with the revolution and each other.

*Outpassage* is a superior work of militaristic SF. The combat sequences (although they tend to be top-heavy with pseudo-realistic futuristic jargon) are as good as any in the subgenre and there is more than lip-service given to the "horrors of war." Unfortunately, *Outpassage* is inferior as a freestanding novel. The focus of the novel is not the experience of combat, but the revolution, which centers around the aliens and their ability to resurrect. Yet the aliens remain off-stage, and the actual process of resurrection remains a mystery at the end of the novel. It is not clear whether it is a mystical process or, as the saying goes, advanced technology which seems like magic. I would assume the latter is the case, but one can't be too sure these days. As this is the crux of the novel, it is a major problem. The solution, of course, would be a sequel. There is no indication (at least in the proofs) that there will be a sequel, nor is there a clear set-up in the novel itself. A sequels would certainly be likely, given the current state of publishing, and welcome, given the current state of this novel.



**Adulthood Rites** by Octavia E. Butler  
(Warner Books, 1988, 277 pp., \$16.95,  
ISBN 0-446-51422-5)

Reviewed by Dean R. Lame

Dawn, the first of Butler's *Xenogenesis* Trilogy, gave us the tortured choice of a new Eve, Lilith Iyapo, as she accepted the genetic manipulations of the alien Oankali. With the second volume, we encounter the even more powerful story of Lilith's son, Akin, and the choices he must make in realization of both his human and his Oankali heritage.

Akin's tale begins before his birth, when both the alien and human parents responsible for his engineered "construct" nature begin to shape his destiny. While still an infant in the "trading village" established in the Amazon Valley of the reseeded Earth, Akin discovers that some humans, the Resistors, refuse to accept Oankali manipulation. When former Resister Tino becomes his foster father and Lilith's lover, however, Akin finally feels content with both his nature and his nurture. Suddenly, this child of alien gods is thrust from his Eden, as kidnappers carry Akin off to, first terrifying treatment, then relative safety among Lilith's old friends, Tate and Gabe, who head the Phoenix group of Resistors.

Although he still looks human—safe for his tongue which may both kill and cure like the Oankali tentacles, Akin knows that he represents no hope for the sterile Resistors. Only those humans who have chosen to join the galactic gene trading mission of the metamorphic Oankali are permitted offspring, construct children who lack the Human Contradiction. Phoenix will never be more than dead ashes, despite the long lives the Oankali have given the Resistors... Akin, torn between his human feelings and his alien rationality, argues for preservation of what is unique to Mankind. As his own post-pubescent metamorphosis approaches, the young man worries that he will lose more than his outward appearance of humanity in the psychological changes he will undergo. Akin fears a very literal alienation from his mother's species, and a bitter extinction of Man.

Again, the storytelling is compelling, while the message screeches with the rasp of fingernails on blackboards. As in David Brin's *The Postman* and John McLoughlin's *Toolmaker Koen*, Butler's central theme, the Human Contradiction, is faulty sociobiology. The argument that macho progressiveness and "hierarchical behaviors" overcome intelligence and doom Mankind to extinction may be trendy, but this "males must go" argument rests on a sandcastle of soggy and suspect evidence. Nevertheless, this novel is one of the year's must-reads, for Butler portrays the two-edged future of biological nanotechnology with accuracy and passion. From the sexuality of Plato's *The Symposium* to the deterministic horrors of Kafka, the Oankali chill to the marrow as they ask again Shakespeare's question: What a piece of work is Man?



**Time Pressure** by Spider Robinson (Ace Books, 1988, 244 pp., \$3.50. ISBN 0-441-80933-2)

Reviewed by Anthony Trull

In the late '70s and early '80s, when he reviewed books for *Galaxy* then *Analogs*, Spider Robinson seemed a major voice in science fiction. I grew up as a reader influenced by his cheerful, optimistic, rather gonzo reviews. His fervent defense of Robert Heinlein's fiction and his rave reviews of some of Heinlein's later novels warp me still. (Warp him too maybe; there are several ways in which this book resembles a later Heinlein novel.) Then he quit reviewing and disappeared from my mental radar screen. (His books don't seem to be reviewed as readily as new Gibson or Sterling novels.)

His new novel, *Time Pressure*, was published in hardcover in 1987, and in paperback this year. The story takes place between a late April snowstorm and the Summer Solstice, 1973, on the North Mountain in Nova Scotia. Sam, the book's narrator, goes out into that snowstorm to recover Mucus Moose the Mucilage Machine and also finds a beautiful woman with no hair, wearing nothing but a golden headband who spills out of a blue egg. Her name is Rachel and she's a time traveler come back to do anthropological studies. She tells little of the future she has left, except that it seems she has sacrificed immortality to make this trip.

Rachel makes friends with almost everyone on the North Mountain and has sex with many of the hippies. The sex often strengthens existing relationships and never has an adverse consequence. What does have adverse consequences is Sam's realization that there are gaps in his memory, that someone has tampered with his mind. Who, but Rachel?

Several interesting, lovable characters inhabit Robinson's North Mountain community, although Rachel the time traveler isn't one of them. There is Snaker, a science fiction writing romantic, and Nazz, a Vietnam vet who has taken too much acid, "and is the better for it," who grins hugely all the time and who seems to be discovering the visual interface now used in Macintosh-like computer systems. Sam himself is Robinson's characteristic blend of rational competence, and open-mindedness to the weird and irrational. He's a man with some honest and painful (albeit, dramatic) hangups.

The story moves effortlessly, and the characters act intelligently, even imaginatively, within their milieu. The book's weakness is a long lecture near the end where the reader is told about many things and shown very few. The lecture is the didactic core of the novel and Robinson simply asserts without demonstration that certain things will work.

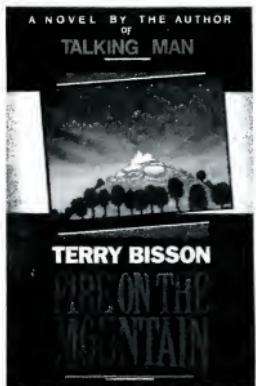
The casualness of the sex seems reminiscent of Heinlein, although unlike Heinlein, here it is appropriate to the times and characters. The sex scenes are also wildly more explicit than the Master would have written and will offend some readers. No one calls anyone else "dear" that I noticed; I'm happy to see Robinson avoid this annoying affectation of later Heinlein characters.

What Robinson does have in common with Heinlein is the tendency to emphasize words in declarative statements (each emphasis is Robinson's):

"Habits can be broken."  
"Sap takes a lot of boiling . . ."  
"People who read a lot of SF are the least gullible . . ."

This isn't necessarily bad, but it creates a distinctive, pontificating (thus Heinlein-esque) tone which cloys. Besides, overuse of italics seems to betray a distrust of the words themselves.

*Time Pressure* is strongest in its picture of everyday living in Sam's house and the Sunrise Hill commune. I felt the cold, saw the Bay, smelled the coffee, and loved the puns.



**Fire on the Mountain** by Terry Bisson (Arbor House, 1988, 167 pp., \$16.95, ISBN 1-55710-014-4)

Reviewed by Howard Coleman

Terry Bisson has already given us two fine novels, *Wyrdmaker* and *Talking Man*, that demonstrated considerable amounts of innovation in the treatment of traditional SF themes. He continues that exhibition of originality in *Fire on the Mountain*, an alternate history tale based on a Civil War what-if: namely, what if John Brown's raid at Harper's Ferry had succeeded? What if a black and white guerrilla army then took to the Virginia hills and inspired an uprising among the South's slaves, so that the Civil War, taught carefully to some of us who grew up in the South as "The War for Southern Independence" became instead a successful war for Black Independence? What if this struggle became a rallying point for the revolutionists of Europe (we're talking a mere eleven years after the convulsions of 1848, after all, of days when Marx's Manifesto was still new), inspiring a round of national insurrections that profoundly altered the world from that which we presume to know? Questions are what alternate histories are for, above and beyond their value as literature, and Bisson's new novel poses some fascinating vistas for speculation and argument.

**Fire on the Mountain** gives us the parallel stories of Dr. Abraham, who was witness to the crucial events of 1859 as a slave boy in northern Virginia, and who recorded those events as an old man in 1909, and of his granddaughter, Yasmin Abraham Martin Odinga, and her daughter Harriet, in 1959. The stories interlace, building the foundation of the modern world, dominated by the great nations of Africa, even as they lay the foundations of that world, set down in the confusion and bloodshed of a century past.

As the twelve-year-old boy faces the external strife of war and the internal turmoil of discovering himself, Yasmin and Harriet struggle to come to terms with their own relationship and how to fit into the rest of their lives, with Yasmin's loss of Harriet's astronaut father years before in space and with the new baby growing inside her.

If all this sounds a bit crowded, it should—and I haven't even mentioned the Mars landing. One of the difficulties with trying to embed a serious novel about real people within the framework of an alternate history lies in reconciling the impulse to show the reader the new world and how it sprung from the old with the duty to deliver a story about people. It isn't easy, and the wider the ripples spread from that original change the author has splashed into time's pond, the harder it is to keep the waves from drowning the characters the book is about.

It's a tough job, and Bisson's partial success is a worthwhile accomplishment. The best-conceived thread of the book is Dr. Abraham's story about the boy who saw himself and the world change all those years ago. To do him, and Yasmin and Harriet, and this fascinating world with its Egyptian automobiles and Mars landings and whiffs of utopian superscience—to do justice to all this could easily consume three times the words of what might or might not turn out to be a better book.

But if this book doesn't hum with the enthusiasm of *Talking Man*, it still presents some wonderful moments and ideas, and that is neither an easy nor an unappreciated gift.



**Ivory** by Mike Resnick (Tor Books, 1988, 374 pp., \$17.95, ISBN 0-312-93093-3) Reviewed by W. Ritchie Benedict

It is said that the number one rule for writers or novelists is to base your plot on something you are familiar with. In the instance of science fiction and fantasy writers, it is a little different. After all, how can you "know" about conditions in another galaxy or alien psychology? Nevertheless, the same reasoning can still be applied—you take some ordinary element of everyday life and combine it with the fantastic. A set of gigantic elephant tusks may not be an ordinary object to most of us, but to Mike Resnick, who I understand has gone on safaris in real life, they are artifacts that he is familiar with. In fact, he includes a photograph of the real tusks at the front of his book. They certainly qualify for the *Guinness Book of World Records*. As the author of over 17 novels, he knows the science fiction field, and I suspect he may be laying claim to the late Clifford D. Simak's unofficial title of SF's chief ecological spokesman.

Thematically, this new novel (Resnick's first in hardcover) resembles the structure of the 1965 movie "The Yellow Rolls Royce," which starred Rex Harrison, in that it is basically a set of short stories linked together through the changing ownership of an unusual object. In the film, it was a yellow Rolls Royce—in this book it is a set of elephant tusks of abnormal size.

The unifying characters are Duncan Rojas, Senior Researcher and Authenticator for Braxton's Records of Big Game and the last surviving Maasai tribesman—Bukoba Mandaka. The year is 6303 of the Galactic Era, and mankind has long since left a depopulated Earth to roam among the stars. Mandaka is desperately trying to locate the tusks for a mysterious reason—something to do with a curse laid down by a witch doctor seven thousand years earlier. The trail has long grown cold. It is at least 3,000 years since the tusks were last reported. However, Rojas is a man who cannot resist a challenge, no matter how difficult it may be, so he undertakes the near-impossible task of finding the ivory for Mandaka.

The tangled history of the tusks leads to many times and places. There is a presidential election in Kenya in 2057 in which they play a leading role, and an episode where the museum housing them is forced to shut down as African relics are no longer deemed important in a high-tech future.

The discovery of the artifacts several thousand years in our future is the key to a vengeful competition by two archeologists who both want a page in the history books. A Maasai gambler loses his ancestors' heritage when he gets into a losing game with a bunch of very strange aliens. We flash back to 1885 when the elephant (Malima Tabez, or The Mountain That Walks) kills the man who is stalking him. Then we flash forward to a war fought by two planets separated by thousands of light years. Warlords and dictators vie for the ivory for different purposes before they too are forced to relinquish their hold. The final discovery by Rojas forces him to

confront facets of his character that he would rather not deal with, particularly after he finds out what Mandaka wishes him to do. The ending comes full circle as the rampaging spirit of the Kilimanjaro elephant is finally laid to rest. In other hands, the narrative of this novel might be disjointed and lacking character develop-

ment.

With Resnick as the author, the book becomes an absorbing tale that draws the reader in and leaves him awaiting the next development. It is unusual in that not many science fiction novelists have used a Kenyan background for science fiction. It succeeds in being a good evening's

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ON THE REFERENCE SHELF: Non-Fiction Books of Note

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Reviewed by Doug Fratz

REFERENCE BOOKS

**A Biographical Dictionary of Science Fiction and Fantasy Authors** by Robert Weinberg (Greenwood, 1988, 362 pp., \$49.95, ISBN 0-313-24349-2) First major reference book on SF & artists; includes historical overview and 250 biographies.

**The NESFA Index to the Science Fiction Magazines and Original Anthologies - 1988**, edited by Jim Mann (New England SF Association, 1988, 82 pp., \$6.00, ISBN 0-915368-32-3) Useful, inexpensively produced reference series; this 1986 volume precedes the 1984-85 index planned for next year.

**Science Fiction & Fantasy Book Review Index, Vol. 18 - 1985** by Hal W. Hall (Hal W. Hall, 1988, 69 pp., \$8.50; Borgo Press editions also available) The latest in another useful reference series; indexes the year's book reviews by author and title.

**Science Fiction: A Teacher's Guide & Resource Book**, edited by Marshall Tamm (Starmont, 1988, 140 pp., \$15.95, ISBN 1-55742-020-3) Very good primer for educators entering SF teaching.

HISTORIES / ESSAY COLLECTIONS

**Strokes: Essays and Reviews 1986-88** by John Clute (Serconia, 1988, 178 pp., \$8.95, ISBN 0-934933-02-2) Excellent, insightful collection by one of SF's best critics of the '70s and '80s. Likely Hugo nominee.

**The Motion of Light In Water** by Samuel R. Delany (Arbor House/Morrow, 1988, 302 pp., \$18.95, ISBN 0-87795-947-1) Delany's frank and revealing account tells us more than we want to know about his late-'50s/early-'60s life in the East Village.

**Trillion Year Spree** by Brian W. Aldiss with David Wingrove (Avon, 1988, 511 pp., \$9.95, ISBN 0-380-70461-7) One of the most important critical works of 1988, now in trade paperback.

**Writing Science Fiction** by Christopher Evans (St. Martin's, 1988, 97 pp., \$10.95, ISBN 0-312-01849-5) Unknown British SF writer decides to tell others how it's done. Actually not a bad basic primer—but does it actually help the field to encourage new writers to enter it who are unsophisticated enough to actually NEED advice this elementary?

**Spectrum of the Fantastic**, edited by Donald Palumbo (Greenwood, 1988, 266 pp., \$45.00, ISBN 0-313-25502-4) Selected academic essays from the 6th International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts; none are of especial interest.

**Positions and Presuppositions in Science Fiction** by Darke Suvin (Kent State University, 1988, 227 pp., \$26.00, ISBN 0-87338-356-7) An impenetrable and unperusable tome by one of the most respected names in academic SF.

ON SINGLE AUTHORS

**PKD - A Philip K. Dick Bibliography**, compiled by Daniel J. H. Levack (Meckler, 1988, 156 pp., \$45.00, ISBN 0-88736-096-3) Revised and up-dated edition of the comprehensive bibliography first issued by Underwood-Miller in 1981; a must for Dick collectors, despite new, higher price.

**Philip K. Dick: In His Own Words** by Gregg Rickman (Fragments West, 1988, 250 pp., \$9.95, ISBN 0-916063-01-1) Revised edition of Dick interview collection first published in 1984; lots of interesting material.

**Dune Master - A Frank Herbert Bibliography** by Daniel J. H. Levack and Mark Willard (Meckler, 1988, 176 pp., \$45.00, ISBN 0-88736-099-8) An amazingly inclusive bibliography, but with high price and poor typography.

**Hugo Gernsback, Father of Modern Science Fiction** by Mark Siegel (Borgo, 1988, 96 pp., \$7, ISBN 0-89370-274-9) Essay on Gernsback, with smaller essays on Frank Herbert and Bram Stoker for good measure.

**J. R. R. Tolkien** by Katharyn W. Crabbe (Continuum, 1988, 233 pp., \$9.95, ISBN 0-8044-6106-6) Expanded and revised edition of academic look at Tolkien from 1981.

**Early Harvest** by Greg Bear (NESFA, 1988, 131 pp., \$15.00, ISBN 0-915368-36-6) Small hardcover collection which includes two short stories, four articles on SF films and several other articles.

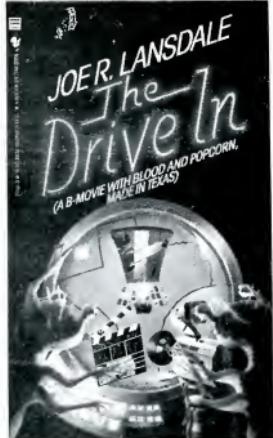
MOVIES

**Revenge of the Creature Features Movie Guide** by John Stanley (Creatures-At-Large, 1988, 420 pp., \$11.95, ISBN 0-940064-04-9) Third edition of the most comprehensive horror movie guide. Recommended for horror movie aficionados.

**Directed by Jack Arnold** by Dana M. Reames (McFarland, 1988, 243 pp., \$24.95, ISBN 0-89950-331-4) A look at the films of the director of *It Came From Outer Space* and *Creature From the Black Lagoon*.

**Roger Corman - The Best of the Cheap** Acts by Mark Thomas McGee (McFarland, 1988, 247 pp., \$24.95, ISBN 0-89950-330-6) A look at the films of the director of the original *Little Shop of Horrors*.

entertainment, and what more could anyone ask?



The Drive-In by Joe Lansdale (Bantam, 1988, 158 pp., \$3.50, ISBN 0-553-27481-3)

Reviewed by Howard Coleman

Readers can get to SF and fantasy by following some very different roads. One can start out with the magazines, descendants (but not relics, I hope) of the pulp traditions of decades gone by. One can start out reading Heinlein, or Norton, or even *The New Yorker* (which, after all, is where Shirley Jackson's game of chance was first played out). One can start with the atmospheric, almost civilized horrors of Algernon Blackwood, or the heart-freezing inevitability of Clive Barker's evil. All these and more are stations along our way.

Joe Lansdale is here with *The Drive-In* to remind us of a trait that, in our sophistication, we might weakly deny. It leads through the banality of interstate highway suburbia, through teenaged summer nights spent gazing through windshields at blood-soaked screens or at couples writhing in the next car, or, if we were lucky, doing a little writhing of our own. He gives us the biggest drive-in movie theater in the world—the biggest in Texas, even—the Orbit. He gives us four teenaged boys making their weekly Friday pilgrimage to the All-Night Horror Show. (I must not neglect the features: *I Dismember Mama*, *The Evil Dead*, *Night of the Living Dead*, *The Toolbox Murders*, and, of course, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*.) He gives us their envelopment in the same horror they had chuckled at, as the grinning red comet sweeps them into—well, like the subtitle says, “A B-movie with blood and popcorn, made in Texas.”

He's devotedly true to the form he honors, is Lansdale. As I watched the movie that this book projected in my head, I nodded with wry familiarity as he touched various themes: the growing desperation

of trapped thousands, cannibalism as the food runs out, the incredible transmutation of innocent (but expendable) teenagers into a suitably disgusting Monster, the heroic attempt at delivery by Our Heroes.

I also found myself wanting to wink and smile as Lansdale never fails to supply the requisite sense of superiority. The crowd has nothing to eat (at first) but concession stand popcorn and sweets, and hypoglycemia runs rampant. The Monster styles itself the Popcorn King and, when the food runs out, feeds its subjects—but I don't want to spoil it for you. There are bikers, intolerable and intolerant Baptists, rednecks and Red-baiters, and a cast of thousands more, trapped in the inferno they/we so often imagine. This is what a *Twilight Zone* episode directed by Herschel Gordon Lewis might have been like. And above it all, on the six giant screens, the movies play on and on.

## CONSIDER PHLEBAS



IAIN M.  
BANKS

Consider Phlebas by Iain M. Banks (St. Martin's Press, 1988, 471 pp., \$18.95, ISBN 0-312-01752-9)

Reviewed by Pascal J. Thomas

A war of galactic proportions pits the alien Idrians against the human Culture. But the latter relies so heavily on its constructed intelligences that it is in danger of becoming its machines, or so thinks Horza. Horza is a Changer, human in appearance but capable of amazing modifications of his body and his very identity. His people have become the Idrians' forced allies, but he supports them wholeheartedly.

And so we follow him across 400 pages of flamboyant, masterful space opera, epic fights, space travel, and demolition on a grandiose scale. Every twist and turn comes precisely at the right minute, and the science fictional gadgets are most ingenious. But do I really enjoy to see the author of *The Bridge* turning out an upgraded Poul Anderson book with some flashes of humor which sound like a toned-down Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy? The book may be compellingly readable, but it does not have the kind of fresh enthusiasm provided by, say, Brin's

Startide Rising or the impact of Bear's Son.

What does make the book a bit different from good old space opera is the doubts that Horza feels about his identity, and eventually the growing unease I felt as I followed him through the sound and fury that the side he so passionately espouses is not the right one—the struggle between the Idrians and the Culture reminds me, for instance, of that between the Japanese and the U.S. (respectively) during World War II. Streaks of originality, yes, but still the epilogue struck me as more interesting than the body of the book; entertainment deluxe.



Crown of Stars by James Tiptree, Jr. (Tor Books, 1988, 340 pp., \$18.95, ISBN 0-312-93105-0)

Reviewed by W. Ritchie Benedict

The real identity of James Tiptree, Jr. was, for a short time in the early '70s, one of the best-kept mysteries of the SF field, until it was revealed that "he" was actually Alice Sheldon, appropriately enough an ex-employee of the CIA. The author turned out two full-length novels during her career, as well as a variety of short stories. She died in 1987, and this new collection of ten unpublished or little known stories (some early writings and some of the very best) will likely be the last we shall ever see of Tiptree in print.

As always in an anthology, the stories are a mixed bag. Most of Tiptree's stories are somewhat grim. Certainly, they have always dealt with deep social concerns, and that is still true with most of the plots represented here. However, there are several stories that illustrate the author's sense of humor. Such as: "Our Resident Djinn" wherein the Devil pays a visit to heaven in order to observe the changes that have been made since he was ejected. "Second Going" has a theological bent as well, and owes a bit to H.G. Wells and *The War of the Worlds*. This time, although the aliens resemble large blue octopi, they are essentially benevolent. Their gods on the other hand are something else again, and they have brought them all with them!

"Morality Meat" takes the anti-abortion debate to the ultimate extreme. Even though you can see the climax coming in advance, it is still quite effective in its impact, as the life of a woman who must give up her baby is connected violently with a trucker who is murdered to disguise a horrific secret.

"Yanqui Doodle" has a definite Vietnam-

era flavor, with the setting being updated to Central America. Pfc Donald Still has been supplied with mind-altering drugs for a year, as US forces battle some faceless guerrillas. The drugs prevent the full knowledge of the acts being committed reaching the conscious mind. It is only when the drugs are removed, so he can go back to the US, that the real trouble begins.

"All This and Heaven Too" is one of the stories that has a lighter touch, combining ecological concerns with a typical fantasy kingdom approach. There are echoes of Romeo and Juliet, as the heirs of Ecologia-Bella and Pluvio-Acidia plan marriage. The ministers of the first nation are understandably dismayed that they may be swallowed by a bunch of ecological slobs

and plan to prevent the wedding. "Last Night and Every Night" is possibly the weakest story in the book, being little more than an incident with a punch-line. It is concerned with street people and surplus population.

"Come Live With Me" is much better, being a first contact story with a telepathic alien life form. It has an upbeat ending which is unusual for Tiptree in that both alien and humans reach a mutually satisfactory accommodation.

"The Earth Doth Like A Snake Renew" takes the old concept of "Gaia" or "Mother Nature" and reverses the sexual nature of our planet, whereupon a woman with an overly romantic nature seeks HIM for the ultimate sexual thrill. The consequences are disastrous to say the least. This one

would be strictly "X-rated" if it was a movie, and I was surprised to see that it originally appeared in Asimov's a few years back when standards were tighter than they are now.

"Backward, Turn Backward" utilizes an interesting form of time-travel where a young man and woman exchange places with their older selves. This one says a lot about our attitudes towards aging and whether we really want to alter our destinies.

"In the Midst of Life," the final story, eerily foreshadows the author's own death and feelings about the hereafter, as a man who commits suicide finds he has not escaped boredom or responsibility in a life beyond the grave that is completely different from any previous concept. This

## AUDIO SF&F REVIEWS by David F. Hamilton

**Nightwings** by Robert Silverberg, read by Fritz Weaver (Listen for Pleasure Inc., 25 Mallard Road, Don Mills, Ontario, Canada M3B 1S4, \$14.95, ISBN 0-88646-213-4)

Robert Silverberg's far-future vision of a world of guir's -- Watchers, Fliers, Rememberers, Changelings -- is brought believably to life through an outstanding reading by Fritz Weaver. Listen for Pleasure has a real winner in this audio presentation. Kudos all around, to G. Goodwin and J. Dunn for outstanding production values. Also to Edward Phillips for his unobtrusive abridgement, which retains the clarity of the story while maintaining a manageable recording length. Finally to Fritz Weaver for an outstanding reading.

Weaver's voice is key to the success of this recording. It is at once wistful and wise, aging yet innocent. A voice you can trust. As such, he is perfectly at home in character of the Watcher -- the aging, world-weary lookout, who thinks that time has passed him and his guild by. A man ready to abandon his watching in search of a new career, even on the eve of the event he has watched for all his life. The story of the Watcher is a tender portrait of a man who fears he has out-lived his usefulness, made even more poignant by Weaver's bittersweet rendition.

Weaver is less at home but still competent, with his portrayal of Gorman the Changeling, Avluvia the Flier, and the Prince of Roun. Their love triangle, which culminates in Gorman plucking out the Prince's eyes as the invasion begins is well-drawn and exciting listening.

**Nightwings** is a worthwhile addition to any audio library. It is an entertaining story, rich in characterization and visual imagery. In addition, it is read to us by a master story-teller who makes us share the characters' pain.

**The Guardians of Time** by Poul Ander-

son, read by Fred Melamed

(Walderstones, P.O. Box 1084, Stamford, CT 06904, \$14.95, ISBN 0-681-32775-8)

**The Guardians of Time** includes two stories from Poul Anderson's now legendary Time Patrol series. They do not disappoint.

The first story, simply entitled "Time Patrol," introduces us to the time patrol, and its newest inductee, Manse Everard, an out-of-work engineer, circa 1954. Everard's first assignment is to fix a glitch in time created by an idealist from the 30th century who has gone back to England during the invasion of the Jutes in order to rewrite history. On this adventure, Everard's partner is a downed WWII British flier named Charles Whitcomb, who has ambitions of his own regarding what can be done with the power of the time patrol.

"The Only Game in Town" is the second story. It is a complex tale in which Everard teams up with an Amerindian named Jack Sandoval to prevent a successful Mongol invasion of the Americas during the time of the Toltecs.

These are wonderful stories, filled with historical imagery and amiable characters. The time paradoxes are handled well, and you do not have to believe in the theoretical possibility of time travel to enjoy these recordings.

The recording quality is very good, and the packaging is attractive, though somewhat difficult to open neatly. The reading by Fred Melamed is consistently good, though not spectacular. Overall, I would say this is a nice job, well worth the two hours invested in listening.

**The Handmaid's Tale** by Margaret Atwood, read by Julie Christie (Listen for Pleasure Inc., 25 Mallard Road, Don Mills, Ontario, Canada M3B 1S4, \$14.95, ISBN 0-88646-214-2)

**The Handmaid's Tale** is a disappointment. It should have been so much better. The ingredients: a big best-selling novel, excellent packaging and production, an outstanding reader -- all pointed to a smash. So what happened?

First, the good news. As usual, Listen for Pleasure's packaging and production values are outstanding. And Julie Christie is, in a word -- perfect. Julie has a luscious, vulnerable quality marvelously suited to

Atwood's heroine. In fact, Ms Christie's reading is so superb, one is almost willing to overlook some rather major flaws.

The primary problem is with the story itself. The premise, while interesting, forces me to stretch well beyond my threshold of believability. The basic idea is this: within the next fifteen years, the AIDS virus will run wild. There may also be some sort of limited nuclear war. The United States will no longer exist. This will all contribute to a catastrophic decline in the birth rate. Due to this, all women capable of bearing children will be rounded up and forced into indentured servitude. They will become handmaids for rich and powerful men; the women's only function will be to produce babies for their masters. Those unable to produce healthy offspring will be shipped off to the colonies -- presumably a fate worse than death. I find it completely beyond the realm of possibility for these kinds of sweeping socio-political changes to occur within one generation.

Unfortunately, these changes must all occur within this time frame, in fact, they must take place during one woman's child-bearing lifetime, in order for the story to work. **The Handmaid's Tale** is told in the first person, from the point of view of one woman who has lived to see the changes, and is still of child-bearing age. I'm sorry, but it's just too much of a stretch for me.

Another problem is the way the story jumps back and forth in time and place -- from the "time before," to the handmaid's training at the hands of the evil Sisters, to the nightmarish present. These constant shifts, often also accompanied by a change in tense, are frequently ineffective, sometimes even jarring. A last ditch attempt to explain away the problem is made at the end of the story, when we learn that the entire novel to this point is a series of audio recordings found one hundred years later, in no particular order, strung together by their locators in a fashion designed to make as much sense of the story as possible.

If you can ignore the serious plot flaws, and be satisfied with a delicious reading by a marvelous actress, give this one a try. On the other hand, if you're a stickler for credibility in plotting, as I am, **The Handmaid's Tale** is not for you. □

story is one of the strongest in the entire book.

Taken as a whole, this book provides a valuable compilation with interesting insights into the mind and values of Alice Sheldon. She was different from any other science fiction or fantasy writer, and although her stories may not be everyone's cup of tea, this is a collection well worth reading.



Becoming Alien, by Rebecca Ore (Tor Books, 1988, 283 pp., \$3.50, ISBN 812-54794-2)

Reviewed by Sharon E. Martin

Tom is an alien among his own, an orphan raised by a sometimes insane brother, a boy with an IQ higher than his teachers wish to accept, a person outside the law, none of these things by his own choosing. But these characteristics are just the ones that make him the perfect choice for what follows.

Tom goes to school and he cares for the chickens that supply eggs and raw materials to run his brother's illegal drug-making operation. Then something crashes and burns near his mountain home and he rescues from the crash a creature he dubs Alpha.

Now, a doomed spacecraft and dead and dying aliens seem like sure trouble to Tom's brother who doesn't want anyone snooping around, not aliens, not the federal boys. But he helps Tom hide the remains of the wreck and he puts Alpha to work. Alpha wants to contact his compatriots and wants Tom to go with him. Our alien-to-be is torn between loyalty to his brother and friendship with Alpha. The situation ends tragically.

Because of this and other incidents, Earth humans are labeled xenophobes, dangerous and too backward for the Federation. But there are some who want all species to have a chance, and Tom accepts the challenge to become a Federation cadet. He is thrust into a world where everyone is

alien and any situation is potentially threatening, not only to his own well-being but to that of planets and entire races.

This is marvelous reading, and while it is purely science fiction, it is also a treatise on humans and their fear of whomever and whatever is different. For insight into human foibles and just plain enjoyment, this book is recommended.



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The Year's Best Fantasy, First Annual Collection, edited by Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling (St. Martin's Press, 1988, 491 pp., \$12.95, ISBN 312-01852-5) Reviewed by Andrew Andrews

This volume is vast. The Year's Best Fantasy encompasses a great deal of published work, from the major SF/fantasy/horror magazines to small press chapbooks and fanzines.

More than 20,000 words of horror and fantasy fiction is included in this volume. I think every source imaginable was culled to present what the editors, in their subjective minds (there's no way else to do this), believe are the best fantasy and horror stories of 1987.

My favorites, "A World Without Toys" (where historical investigators delve deep into a hole where an old house, containing antique toys, lies); "Author's Notes" by Edward Bryant (what do you think an author is going through when he writes his horrors?); "Soft Monkey" by Harlan Ellison (an Edgar award winner this year), and the much-collected, deeply disturbing "Halley's Passing" by Michael McDowell (easily the most frightening story in a decade). There are many other fine stories, including some (yes, some) by Lucius Shepard and many others, from across the spectrum of SF, fantasy, and horror. This is a gold mine of a book. □



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David Brin  
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I've finally had a chance to read Thomas Easias's letter in the Summer '88 issue of *THRUST*, about my supposed "conduction aphasia" in *The Uplift War*. I got a good laugh out of it. (Although to be inculpated for the misdemeanor of aerolian anti-loquacity, if not outright baragouin, is close to fightin' words, where I harken from.)

Now how can I justify the use of words such as allochrous, or antephatically or colubrine in a mass market SF paperback? How does this jibe with my oft-spoken belief in "accessible" literature? (At the risk of jactitation, I claim to eschew lexicaphobic logodaedaly and cedonism.)

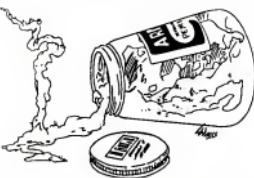
My role model is Mark Twain, who wrote indisputably great literary works which advanced the novel, but which nonetheless can be read and enjoyed by a bright 12-year old. On the other hand, I believe some talented writers such as Thomas Pynchon betrayed their public and themselves by writing turgid tomes which are almost impossibly dense. (Euphemism is such a ptarmonic trait, don't you think?)

At the same time, however, I am also a bit fanatical about certain elements of style. For instance, there's "Repetitis," when an author uses the same word too often in close proximity. It can grate on some readers, and certainly degrades the quality of the prose. Independent of this, I am also frustrated at times when there just doesn't seem to be a word that's "right" for the phrase or sentence I have in mind. Each of the words cited by Mr. Easias was exactly correct for the place where it was used, and staved off much longer descriptive passages. (Far from being logoleptic, I am always willing to submit my work to expert diasekasis.)

I am always careful to make certain that no one "obscure" adjective will render a sentence meaningless to someone unfamiliar with that word alone. I well recall when I was a child I would often encounter in a novel some word I did not know. What happened then was either a) I went to look it up, or b) I took the word in, using the context of the rest of the sentence to frame its meaning. I would wager that most of the words you and I know were acquired that way (sometimes obstinately incorrectly!) from spoken or written context. (This is easy when the rhetor takes care to remain exoteric, rather than esoteric, and his facundity is leavened with lots of earthy, even fescine context.)

I feel particularly free to experiment in a book that's a "page-turner"—one with a lot of action and adventure in it. In such a novel, most hurried readers just leap over anything that looks like an obstacle, while those moving at a more leisurely pace may take advantage of an opportunity to expand their vocabularies. (Anyway, a dozen or so words in a 160,000-word

# Counter-Thrusts



## LETTERS

novel doesn't seem like that much.) (Would Easias have me be an autologophagist? I'm willing to eat my own words, but one might say an author IS his own words. So must I be a endoprophagist as well?)

Now, having said all that, have I adequately explained the use of words like "bromopean" in an SF novel? Well, no, not really. When it comes right down to it is the question of WHO the writer is writing for. Very few authors will tell you that writing is easy. Sometimes it isn't enough to think of all those people out there who'll read your words, or to imagine the money, or to contemplate the movie deals, or even to ponder the glimmering prospect of flocks of screaming, author-crazed babes. Sometimes the only thing to keep you going is the feeling you get from the words themselves--not just the actions and emotions they evoke, not even the deep meanings and moral lessons they're supposed to convey, but the words. Their texture and flow and sound.

The English language is the marvel it is because it is boundless, loose, undisciplined, bold and eleutheroniamical. So in answer to Mr. Easias's jobatious question, I have to reply in all dicacity that I use the words I want to use, because they please me. If the fruits of my labors didn't please me, I doubt I'd finish another book.

[Judging from *The Uplift War*'s win of this year's Hugo Award for best novel, it appears that SF readers may indeed have a predilection for a spattering of tenebrous terms in their SF adventure novels. - DDF]

David Langford  
94 London Road  
Reading, Berkshire  
England RG1 5AU

The riddle of David Brin's arcane vocabulary (as researched by Timothy Easias in *THRUST* 30) fascinates me. "Callipose" doesn't ring any bells, but "cliquant" is surely a typo for "clinquant," meaning glittering--a word used more than once by the author whose style is immediately conjured up by the whole jaw-breaking list of obscurities. Readers who haven't

guessed which author might be helped by my effort to convey the subtle flavour of two trilogies in a single short passage, written for a soon-to-be published collection of SF and fantasy skits (*The Dragonhiker's Guide to Battlefield Covenant at Dune's Edge: Odyssey Two*, forthcoming from Drunken Dragon Press here in England):

"'Hellfire!' erupted Thomas Covenant, his raw, self-inflicted nostrils clutching in white-hot, stoical anguish while his gaunt, compulsory visage knotted with fey misery. His lungs were clogged with ruin, and a snarl sprang across his teeth. A hot, gelid, gagging, fulvous tide of self-accusation dinned in his ears: leper bestseller outcast unclean.... To release the analytic refugeence, the wild magic of the white gold ring he wore, could conceivably shatter the Arch of Time, utterly destroy the Land, and put a premature, preterite end to the plot!

"Yet what other way was there? The argue notion pierced my mind like a jerid. Only thus could the unamberged malison of Lord Foul be anealed. Only thus. He clenched his clenching. Hellfire and damnation!

"At that point he winced at a swift, sapid lusculation. "But I don't believe in this fantasy Land," he rasped with sudden caducity, lurching and reeling in vertigo as though from an overdose of clinquant roborant. "So even if it's utterly destroyed ... what's the odds? I'm a leper, I can do what I like."

"With an exigent effort, he unclenched his teeth and articulated the aegis of his cynosure. Limned on his hand, the white gold ring began to flare darkly....

"Hang on a moment," flinched Lord Foul, his editor at Del Rey Books. "Perhaps we could negotiate on this?"

[Dave's book of parodies was released by Drunken Dragon Press Ltd. in late October. It is available in the U.S.A. from Dreamhaven Books and Art, 1300 4th St. S.E., Minneapolis, MN 55414. - DDF]

Gregory Benford  
1105 Skyline Drive  
Laguna Beach, CA 92651

Jessica Salmonson (in *THRUST* 31) mistakes my sentiments when I discussed the relative nonpopularity of the New Wave writers in the LOCUS Poll. I wasn't cackling with glee, merely reporting the familiar dispersion between the high art segment of SF and the larger audience. I do think, though, that Jessica is imagining some "disciples of the old guard" who are still decrying the New Wave--and certainly I'm not one such. I learned a lot from those days, as did (notably) Joe Haldeman and Fred Pohl. They opened the eyes of many to the range of technique that could be brought to SF.

Further, I think Jessica's attempts to guess which writers will turn out to be graced by Literary History lead her to play the game according to mainstream's rules. One of the lit'y establishment's classic logic loops is to maintain that the best stuff survives, then ignore outsider literatures, thus ensuring that they'll be "forgotten." Why not just admit that SF is

a broad field, and trying to divide it by who influenced whom is not the deepest way to explain the root question—why we like our specific varieties in the first place. Bill Forstchen seems to feel similarly, when he points out that SF is now so wedded to the space program that you can't tell the metaphors without a guidebook nowadays.

T. Jackson King  
4780 Andrews Road  
Medford, OR 97501

In *THRUST* 29 Jessica Amanda Salmonson showed us all how NOT to behave as writers, as readers of SF, and as people—male or female.

What is the point of shamelessly promoting oneself, as Salmonson does in haughtily proclaiming the suzerainty of her anthology over all its imitators, calling it "one of the more influential anthologies in the last ten years"? Or in so lauditorily describing her own writing vision? Salmonson then turns sexist in her attitudes by bashing men and undercutting good women writers by saying "when it started to pay, men moved in," which is incorrect (there were good men fantasy writers long before Salmonson herself), and degrading to the true societal challenges women have had to overcome since the time of Hammurabi.

She next turns to putting down the entire field of feminist science fiction writing and all current writers, calling both the writers and the readers "essentially mediocre." This arrogance is of course reflected in her own view of her own popularity, where she says—in effect—that he's not sure if she likes being popular if it means that she has to associate with the hoi polloi of all these other miserable women fantasy writers. I would also ask her what's wrong with "publishers who don't want critical or artistic successes that are economic disasters"? Seems to me that something which is an economic disaster might not truly be much of an artistic success, if it can't appeal to more than a minuscule group of self-appointed arbiters of writing quality.

I also disagree vigorously with some of Ms. Salmonson's other views, her view that science fiction is "moribund" and her alleged view in another writing forum that few SFWA people will ever approach the higher end of artistry. And with the "holier than thou" attitude she displays, Darrell Schweitzer is truly correct when he states Ms. Salmonson "hasn't learned to be nice."

The real point of my objection to things most thinking writers and people will recognize immediately as canards, as inverted sexist thinking, as elitist posturing, and as simply bad manners, is to suggest that our field needs more civility. This is not a new suggestion, but it bears repeating. People, we all live in a glass house, and it does no good to throw stones by partaking of the literati view that most of science fiction is juvenile garbage. It isn't. It's good literature in and of itself, written by people of varying abilities. We need to adopt more of Ardath Mayhar's view in her article, the need to return to more "imagination" and joyful "nonsense"

in science fiction. It's time for us all to engage in a little useful "mythmaking," when we write hard SF, social SF, cyberpunk, Old Wave, New Wave, or whatever.

As a new pro with only two novel sales and a few short story sales, I have only one decent credential: That of having read SF for 27 years before I began writing seriously three years ago. While I may be new to writing SF, I know the field. I'm a better person for having read SF. I'm a scientist (archaeologist-anthropologist) because of it and the influence of Robert Heinlein. The most common message of SF in general is the acceptance of diversity, of differences, of the positive potential in our species despite our differences and our idiocies. Let's all reject the elitist attitude that Salmonson seems to espouse and the "lesbian separatist fiction" that Anita Alverlo refers to, so that men and women, with equal opportunity to display their differences and their strengths, together can move the species into a difficult future.

On the Dozois issue of publishing "new writers" raised by George Adis, my answer, as someone who's been on the receiving line of four personal typewritten rejection notes addressed to "Tom" in a friendly, informal manner, is—yes! He does encourage new writers. According to Dozois' letter in *THRUST* 30, I'm just one of the new writers for whom Gardner is doing this. I've also been the recipient of similar encouraging notes from Pat Price, Stan Schmidt, Ed Ferman, Chris Napolitano (*Playboy*), Ellen Datlow, and Charlie Ryan. In my experience, the senior editors in the field do want to encourage new talent.

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While in general agreement with the conclusion reached by Jessica Amanda Salmonson's rationalization (in *THRUST* 31) of why the New Wave was not prominent in the recent LOCUS poll of all-time best novels, I disagree with portions of Salmonson's logic. Rather than rehash the LOCUS poll, I'm more concerned with Salmonson's implied theory that labels fans of pulp writers as "old farts."

Salmonson's statement, "Old farts would pad the voting with writers," evidences a myopic dismissal of the majority of pre-New Wave novels, as well as a lack of awareness of the enormous diversity of fiction published in the pulp magazines. It also implies that fans of pulp writers are at odds with fans of New Wave writers.

There's no monolithic pulp-writer style. Salmonson's "old fart" statement makes as little sense as lumping together Benford, Niven and Card as "traditionalists," as Salmonson also does in the same letter. I doubt if John W. Campbell, the icon of traditionalism, would have published anything by Card. I can't recall any of Card's work having been published in Schmidt's ANALOG, the most traditional magazine of the '80s.

Salmonson's comments frequently have a spiteful illogic to them. The occasional correctness of her conclusions aside, the weak, prejudice-ridden swipes she uses to

persuade tend to antagonize the reader more than to convince. To dismiss persons under 30 as "kidniks...who probably couldn't tell you the names of ten authors who started in the '60s" is just as wrong as to dismiss fans of pulp writers as "old farts." Ironically, in the same letter, Salmonson attacks Ardath Mayhar for her generalizations about tall homely women being, by definition, humorous characters. The standards one applies to others one should also apply to oneself.

There are those who enjoy both writers of the pulp era and of the New Wave. It is not mutually exclusive to value both Robert Heinlein and Michael Moorcock. Jerry Cornelius and Lazarus Long may live in different neighborhoods, but we can appreciate each without diminishing the other.

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*THRUST* 31 is one of your best issues yet, featuring several really good, meaty articles.

But there are a few odd points too. Charles Platt has certainly changed his tune on Delany. Is this the same Platt who was writing in *NEW WORLDS* #216 that "the great stylist is barely capable of writing a grammatical sentence, has no idea of how to structure a novel, and is stylistically tone-deaf"? And went on to say, "Delany's faults are so numerous that it is surprising he has any reputation at all, still less a reputation as a stylist. That he has gone further and written essays criticizing the prose of others would be an outrage, were it not for the fact that his criticism is itself so clumsily phrased that it is almost impossible to read, and therefore unlikely to influence public opinion at all." And further: "The portentous complexity of Delany's wall of words cons the dross, while the sheer difficulty of it convinces non-academics that they must be missing something."

And now he tells us that Delany's "prose tends to be lyrical and complex, characterized more by exotic metaphors than cheap thrills," and thus is likely to be beyond the feeble comprehension of lowly SF readers.

But I think that Charles has raised a serious point: Was Delany censored? I would guess that he was, but not by any vilti conspiracy of anti-gay sentiment. No, I think it's just the television/bestseller mentality that has struck again. There does appear to be a market for Delany's later fiction, and whether it is comprised of rarified souls or pseudo-intellectuals is irrelevant to the publisher—a pseudo-intellectual's money is as good as anyone else's. What I think is likely is that when the big chains found out about the gay content of Delany's books, they said, "My God! That won't play in Peoria! Cut the print runs!" They overlooked the fact that it was already playing quite well in Peoria, and if they would have just kept their mouths shut and maintained the print runs, they could have sold as many copies as before.

So the book industry, like television, is increasingly run by scared illiterates, who

want to avoid any fuss. Like our presidential candidates, they are without ideas of their own, unable to lead or inspire, but eager to align themselves with the beliefs of the largest portion of the population. But the important function of literature is not to say "I agree with you," but rather, "Think about this new thing."

In the end, we may end up just like the British, with many of the best and most challenging books published by small specialty presses like Kerosina.

Speaking of Brits, I'm a little disappointed to see Dave Langford (in an otherwise amusing article) indulge in ritual Longyear-bashing, much as we used to go in for ritual Lin-Carter-bashing. Longyear isn't the greatest writer, and certainly some of his Momus books were unnecessary, but anyone who reads him will find a reasonably talented writer capable of serious work. Longyear, in "Enemy Mine," *Sea of Glass*, and some others, has produced distinctive works of real substance. While I don't think he will go down as one of our stellar lights, he belongs decently in the middle range; maybe some people should look at his work again.

Lee Smith  
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Long ago, Damon Knight documented, fairly conclusively, that horror as entertainment goes in cycles. What I believe Schweitzer was getting at [in *THRUST* 30] and which McGarry, simply lacking perspective, has missed, is that the Blatty and Levin books happened to come along at the beginning of a new cycle, when interest in horror was just starting to rekindle. King had the good fortune to break into mass notice just as the cycle exploded into full ripeness. King's bigger reputation and exposure is partly a matter of timing, as well as of frequency and prolificity.

Actually, you [Doug Frazz] probably best summed up The Stand when you described it as fantasy with SF motifs. McGarry's argument for it being SF is nonsense. As Spider Robinson pointed out in ANALOG, King has a basic fear and mistrust of science and rationality. Writers with this attitude always produce, as Damon Knight dubbed it, "anti-science-fiction."

J. Michael Straczynski, TV writer par-excellence, was recently bemoaning on the radio the shortcomings of the new Star Trek TV series. He described how he had tried watching an episode, but the story only grew more inconsistent, confusing, inane, and unconvincing; he gave up and didn't even finish. I think the blame for this can be placed on Roddenberry's policies regarding writers. For the original Star Trek, he contacted almost exclusively real SF writers, many of whom had little or no script-writing experience. This time he has taken the opposite approach. To qualify for a Star Trek: The Next Generation assignment, you have to have a certain number of recent script credits. So only regular TV writers qualify, even if they think a parsec is just over two-and-a-half hours. Obviously, the effect of this inane policy is devastating. Back a couple of years ago, David Gerrold was appearing at conventions explaining

what STTNG would be like. Norman Spinrad was in the audience at one con, and someone suggested he do a *saqau* to "The Doomsday Machine." Gerrold said that if Norman wants to write for the new show, all Norman has to do is give him a call. After Gerrold left STTNG, Spinrad did inquire, and was told that he didn't possess enough expertise, i.e. enough credits. Which is utter nonsense, as evidenced by the magnificent episode of *Werewolf* Spinrad did recently. (Ironically, "The Doomsday Machine" script was the one circulated among new writers in 1986 as the best example of the old series--as a guide and level-of-excellence to strive for.)

Although there have been some bright

spots, not only do the regular STTNG writers lack technical acumen, but also possess little expertise in motivation, plausibility, plotting, characterization, or convincing ideas.

I'll too have yet to see any episode of Star Trek: The Next Generation all the way through. The few episodes of which I've forced myself to watch more than a few minutes have left me with a strong desire not to bother. One of the more annoying things about many of the segments I've seen is that the plots are often driven by the adult characters--but usually not young Wesley--being too dense to figure out what is made exceedingly obvious to any 10-year-old viewer. -DDFI □

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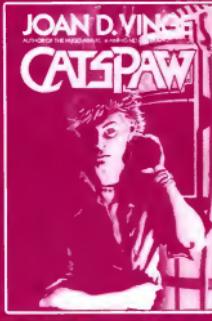
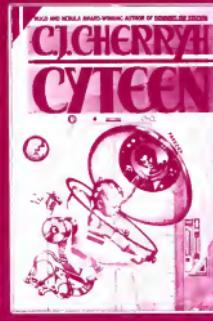
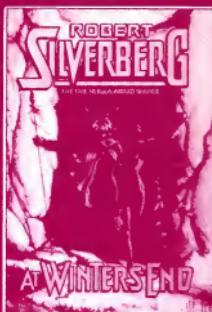
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